Symbolic Exchanges: Haiti, Brazil and the Ethnopoetics of Cultural Identity

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This work is a comparative study of the influence of the pan-Africanist discourse of ethnographers Dr. Jean Price-Mars of Haiti and Dr. Arthur Ramos of Brazil, and its impact on the respective literatures and cinemas of the two nations. Beginning in the first quarter of the 20th Century, and stemming from a developing auto-ethnography undertaken by the two scholars, a growing concern over defining cultural identity inspired a generation of writers to appropriate ethnographic methodology and apply it to their fictional works. The discourse of representation, which looked to popular sources for inspiration (Haitian Indigénisme and Brazilian Regionalismo), or which rebelled against literary conventions (modernists of both nations), gave rise to a contentious dispute over a State-sanctioned national identity versus a cultural identity spearheaded by the literati. In looking at the battle over signification, I examine the development of an ethnopoetics in the works of such writers as René Depestre, Jean-Baptiste Cinéas, Jacques Roumain, Jorge Amado, Rachel de Queiroz, Mário de Andrade and others, that is persistently used to subvert and oppose the official discourse of the State and its allies. Following the model provided by the Indigénistes, Regionalists and Modernists, and utilizing the framework of French filmmaker Jean Rouch’s conceptualization of ethnofictions, the final chapter of the dissertation examines the blurring of the lines between narrative cinema and documentary as a counterdiscursive strategy in Haitian and Brazilian films.
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Comparative work between Haiti and Brazil, particularly in the fields of literature and cinema, is relatively scant. Traditionally, it is more common to find Haiti among works on the Caribbean, and Brazil included (by no means consistently) within the larger field of Latin American Studies. The vast majority of comparative analyses that do juxtapose Haiti and Brazil are primarily in the area of religious studies. Scholars of various disciplines, working through a multitude of theoretical frameworks have pointed out recurrent parallels in the historical moments of the Americas in such specific categories as those pertaining to the fields of African Diaspora Studies or colonial history, to name two. Prevailing patterns (a list by no means exhaustive) include those concerning religion, cultural acceptance, slavery, race relations, education, political repression, peasant societies.

It was, in fact, via readings in ethnography while studying Haiti and Brazil independently, that the necessity for a comparative study of the literatures of these two nations, particularly the production period beginning in the first half of the twentieth century, became apparent to me. Considering their inconsistent relationships to the corpus of Latin American Studies, I endeavored to learn how Brazil and Haiti related themselves to a field of study which by turns includes or excludes them. More specifically, I wanted to understand whether this ambivalence manifested itself in literary works considered as representative of cultural identity. Contemporary thought in Cultural Studies, particularly as articulated by sociologist Stuart Hall, calls for an interrogation of the processes and practices that shape signification. In seeking to understand the
constitutive aspects of representation, it is necessary to look at the sociopolitical contexts wherein certain cultural elements are privileged as uniquely symbolic of the collectivity; in the case of Haiti and Brazil specifically, my point of departure is the period in which a particular way of articulating culture took form based upon innovations in ethnographic research.

Over the decades of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, social scientists, writers and members of the general population of Brazil and of Haiti have cast furtive and curious glances toward each other. Whether reading Camille Roussan’s “Poème de la nuit sans courage” where the poet pays homage to the god of War, Ogoun (Ogum) in Bahia, or listening to the lyrics of Caetano Veloso and Gilberto Gil’s “Haiti”, where the songwriters make an implicit comparison between Brazil and Haiti, asking the rhetorical question “Is Haiti here?”, the awareness of a parallel trajectory is more prevalent than one might first conclude (Roussan 1978; Veloso & Gil 1993). It is my aim to examine these parallels, to analyze points of convergence and divergence between representations of the two nations and the cross-cultural and transnational scholarship undertaken by researchers and writers and filmmakers over the years.

That during the early decades of the twentieth century social scientists such as Jean Price-Mars, Jacques Roumain, Jean-Claude Dorsainvil of Haiti, and Arthur Ramos, Mário de Andrade and Edison Carneiro of Brazil were themselves engaging in projects around the formation of a cultural identity closely tied to the nation, is well known and documented. What is less familiar is the level of integration between the works of two of the most prominent social scientists of these two countries: Dr. Jean Price-Mars of Haiti and Dr. Arthur Ramos of Brazil, in the context of emerging pan-African Studies in the
1920s through the 1950s. Their influence on the development of the discipline of Ethnology in the Americas inspired a closer look at the forces compelling them toward the articulation of an autoethnography that countered the racialist discourses dominating the evolving discipline well into the early part of the last century. Also of great interest were their individual comparatist perspectives and their steadfast belief in the value of a politically engaged literature as an essential method in the production and dissemination of culture.

The lack of a substantial body of scholarship of a comparative nature between Haiti and Brazil is a void that this project seeks to address by following through on the cross-cultural discourse initiated by Ramos and Price-Mars. The de facto complicity between anthropology and the colonial enterprise was not lost on the two scholars, and their work presented a challenge to traditional ethnography, which privileged the authority of the Western scientist (read foreign – I make the distinction since Price-Mars and Ramos inevitably belong to the tradition of Western ethnography, however destabilizing their inclusion may be), discounting any possibility of bias and thereby enshrining his or her views as the “Truth” about the culture under examination. With an eye toward the global and the local, Price-Mars and Ramos sought to extricate the particular from the universal and they questioned the objectivity of traditional anthropology even as they held themselves to be arbiters of truth.

The two men engaged each other as colleagues and with the mediation of fellow scholar Richard Pattee, drew information from regional sources such as Cuban anthropologist Fernando Ortiz (1880-1969) and American anthropologist Melville Herskovitz (1895-1963), as well as their own local progenitors: Brazil’s Raimundo Nina
Rodrigues (1862-1906) and Haiti’s Joseph Antenor Firmin (1850-1911). Ramos and Price-Mars read voraciously and were pioneers in ethnology, ethnography and pan-Africanist studies. Both scholars worked for a time in the United States, with Price-Mars at the United Nations, and Ramos having taught at both Louisiana State and Northwestern University, and in France where Price-Mars served as Haitian Ambassador and Ramos headed UNESCO’s Social Sciences Division.

Their mutual correspondence provides the initial impetus for the comparative nature of this study. Their early privileging of folklore as an apparatus for the search of the locus of an authentic identity is emblematic of Anthony Cohen’s following “post-modern” statement: “When we look at the political processes which attended the struggles of decolonization and the welding together of disparate indigenous entities into the solidary Independence [sic] state, we encounter repeatedly the expedient use of a kind of folkloric “culture”: the projection of the enlarged icons of an idealized peoplehood (Cohen 202).” Certainly, in the early conceptualizations of authenticity in the Americas, developing an idealized national identity was central in the adaptation to an encroaching modern political reality.

In the case of Ramos and Price-Mars (two medical doctors), the rejection of facile interpretations is one element that draws them into the field of ethnography. It is a complex role for each, as the relationship between observer and informant is collapsed into one body with a plural function, further complicating the neatness of the oppositional premises of anthropological fieldwork. Their first-hand knowledge of their respective cultures is based on an intimate familiarity with local mores, but this fact of being a “native informant” did not preclude them from doing fieldwork as well, nor did it impede
the contextualization of their findings. Both men made trips within their respective nations, coming into contact with the various ethnic groups and social classes of their country’s population. Each man was also well-traveled and each lived abroad at some point, by choice or by expediency, either serving in diplomatic functions or pursuing educational endeavors. Their joint efforts laid the foundations of cross-cultural study with long-standing repercussions for both countries.

Twentieth-century ethnographic writing exhibits residual traces of the previous century’s literary influences, particularly Naturalism and Realism. In both Brazil and Haiti, nineteenth-century literature is characterized as derivative and looking to Europe for sources of inspiration. Indeed, the literary capital of predilection is neither Port-au-Prince nor Rio de Janeiro; it is Paris, France. The authors of early examples of the regional novel that developed in each nation (the Romance Regionalista in Brazil and the Roman Indigéniste in Haiti), though extricating themselves from Europe geographically (and by extension from the metropolitan centers), remained faithful to the descriptive stylistics and social analysis of the luminary French novelist Emile Zola, in an adherence to detailed descriptions, particularly topographical ones.

The other concurrent tendency, Modernism, embraced the major movements of the early twentieth century: Futurism and Surrealism. The resultant bifurcation is evident in works as diverse as those of Brazil’s Mário de Andrade and Haiti’s René Depestre, which even while they too seize upon ethnographic elements, divorce themselves from the more straightforward descriptiveness present in the regionalist literature in the work of such writers as Graciliano Ramos and Jean-Baptiste Cinéas of Brazil and Haiti respectively. Freeing itself from realism and naturalism, literary modernism challenged
previous modes of narration. In its aspect of rebellion against nineteenth-century norms, modernist literature approximates the aspirations of twentieth-century ethnography in the Americas, with social scientists themselves questioning the premises and methods of the very discipline they were helping to shape.

In the late 20th century, scholars such as Clifford Geertz, George Marcus and James Clifford began to “deconstruct the discourse of anthropology and the relationship between ‘authoritative’ self and ‘naïve’ other on which the discipline traditionally depended (Mascia-Lees & Sharpe 679).” Based upon the writings of Price-Mars and Ramos beginning in the 1930s, I contend that the two ethnographers problematize this relationship long before the deconstruction of the binary opposition of observer/informant by post-modern ethnographers, though not in as explicit terms as Geertz and Clifford, and not through the questioning of the function of language itself. From the moment of their individual forays into the discipline of Ethnology, Ramos and Price-Mars exemplified Reed-Danahan’s observations on autoethnography, displaying a marked “resistance to dominant discourses [offering instead a] native account … [presenting an autoethnographic] set of issues relating to studies by anthropologists of their ‘own people’” (Reed-Danahy 4-7). Because they studied their own cultures with the critical eye of the Western observer but with the deep understanding of the native informant and contextualized their findings historically as well, they exhibit qualities that suggests to me that one can consider them post-modern ethnographers avant la lettre.

This is not to imply that post-modern ethnography is a unified method or a fixed convention, or that it is synonymous with autoethnography. If Modernist anthropology was primarily concerned with judging difference from a position of a privileged norm,
Ramos’s and Price-Mars’s questioning of accepted authoritative knowledge is consistent with a tenet of post-modernism that is self-consciously critical of that authoritative stance. The two ethnographers’s insistence on the potential influence that cultural symbols have on the collectivity has a bearing on contemporary interpretive anthropology. Their practice of ethnography was always tied to a specific intention: to enable the general population to attain greater cultural comprehension and cohesion. Social understanding was, in this way, an essential adjunct to scientific rigor; underlying structures were important in so much as they served to identify social constructs that pointed to variance and by extension, to isolate elements of ethnic particularity. As social scientists who never completely disassociated themselves from their subjects, they also considered themselves part of the collectivity that they sought to define: ethnographers of the self. I see Ramos and Price-Mars as operating within two cultural systems and their attempts to reconcile competing perspectives makes theirs a disruptive presence to the status quo.

Price-Mars and Ramos anticipated the self-reflexive mood of post-modern anthropology as articulated by scholars such as Clifford Geertz, James Clifford and George Marcus beginning in the 1970s. A focus on the ways in which the problematic relationship between science and art, between the ethnographer and the object of study, between ethnography and autoethnography, provides an opportunity for looking at the strategies invoked in the choices of representation and methods of ethnographic presentation. As Alisdair Pettinger puts it: “It is not surprising that writers in the formerly colonized areas of the world refuse to accept versions of themselves which rely on Western European notions of what counts as interesting and important” (Pettinger 162).
The gesture of refusal is fraught with consequences and it is a move that has intriguing implications.

Ramos and Price-Mars bristled at the notion of Haitian or Brazilian, or for that matter African-American culture, being presented as a monolithic entity. They were critical of the ways some foreign ethnographers over-generalized their findings. Ramos himself points to the varied nature of Brazil’s population and its potential for ethnographic research: “The high percentage of mulattoes in the Brazilian population shows that Brazil is a rich field for the investigation of hybridism” (Ramos 1941, 521). If we locate Ramos’s use of the term “hybridism” within the parameters of the concept of métissage in the manner that scholar Françoise Lionnet uses it, “[m]étissage is a form of bricolage in the sense used by Claude Lévi-Strauss, but as an aesthetic concept it encompasses far more: it brings together biology and history, anthropology and philosophy, linguistics and literature,” we are better able to go beyond the biological emphasis Ramos seems to place on the term and analyze the cultural implications (Lionnet 1989, 8). It is the fuller definition provided by Lionnet which allows for a better understanding of the importance of Ramos’s and Price-Mars’s contributions to ethnography and beyond.

The two ethnographers challenged the anthropological bias which often overlooked a variety of facets of culture in favor of religious or Amerindian studies. Works on Haiti (particularly dating from the 1930s to the 1950s) typically focused on Vodu, while several of those on Brazil concentrated on Candomblé and Macumba; French Anthropologist Claude Lévi-Strauss’s corpus, for example, includes studies on the indigenous populations of Brazil. Although Price-Mars and Ramos also investigated the
indigenous syncretic religions, their analyses were presented in context, without the fetishized fascination of those who consider the cults as both universally practiced and aberrant. In their endeavors to understand the non-sanctioned, demotic Afro-American religions of their own countries, the two scholars looked beyond their own borders, to Africa, to Cuba, to the United States and to each other’s nations in order to de-mystify what others of the period understood to be magic or superstition. Indeed, both Brazil and Haiti had to contend with State-sponsored anti-superstitious campaigns against *Vodu* and *Candomblé*, which led to cladestinity and only increased the air of mystery that lured some foreign travelers in search of excitement.¹ Without the contributions of Ramos and Price-Mars to comparative study, it would be difficult to imagine the possibility of the work of such scholars as José Flávio Pessoa de Barros, Arno Vogel, Marco Antonio da Silva Mello, authors of *Tradições Afro-Americanas: Vodu e Candomblé*.

The efforts of Price-Mars and Ramos (and particularly their correspondence with each other) demonstrate the extent to which they were aware of ethnography as a vehicle through which national identity can be constructed; how ethnographic writing relies less on facts as presented than on how they are construed and misconstrued and how the strategic use of language can either render meaning clear or confound understanding.

¹ Joan Dayan describes the situation in *Un Arc-en-ciel pour l’occident Chrétien: the Poetic Ritual of René Depestre* – 1971: 5 In Haiti, “The ‘anti-superstitious campaign,’ [was] launched in 1941 by the Catholic clergy to outlaw and disband the Voodoo cults, with full support of Lescot’s government…The clergy insisted upon an anti-superstitious oath to be taken by the ‘faithful,’ crushing all that the foremost indigenists had extolled.” See also Pierre Mabille’s account in “Appreciations of Haiti” in the collection of essays Refusal of the Shadow: Surrealism and the Caribbean. Brazilian scholar Abdias do Nascimento makes a similar statement in his article “African Culture in Brazilian Art” Journal of Black Studies 8.4 (Jun., 1978): 399: “The *Candomblé* is the name given in Bahia to the Cult of the Orixás. It refers mainly to the religion of the Yoruba-speaking peoples brought from Nigeria, but also encompasses the variations of other cultural groups such as the Angola-Congo. It has played an important role in Brazil, where the Catholic Church has for centuries maintained a position of power as the official state religion. Attacked by the Catholic priests, persecuted by the police, the *Candomblé* temples – *terreiros* – had to be hidden in woods, hillsides, and all sorts of places of difficult access and visibility for the enemies.” See also Jorge Amado’s account in his interview with Alice Raillard.
The rapport between literature and ethnographic inscription, the friction between cultural politics and modes of representation and the direct impact of social scientists in the mediating of identity motivated an examination of the dialogical relationships at work in the evolution of cultural norms and nationalist symbols. In order to fully understand the dynamic ferment that characterized the innovative movements and exchanges taking place in the two nations at the start of the twentieth century, I sought to include a variety of sources feeling that what was being written about the texts was at least as important as the literary works and ethnographic monographs themselves. To that end correspondence, interviews, critical reviews and essays play an important role in gauging the aims of the writers against the reception of the works.

In part, this project represents an attempt to understand the mechanisms at play in the endowment of value to culture-specific symbols in the context of Haiti and Brazil. I seek to analyze the cross-pollination (between disciplines, countries and texts) of symbolic elements in the forging of a cultural identity as they emerged in early twentieth-century Brazil and Haiti, tracing the ways in which they continued to evolve in the latter half of the last century, particularly via the conduits of literary and cinematic expression. By placing into dialogue the concepts of “literary” and “visual” anthropology and engaging in readings that are culturally foregrounded, I seek to utilize a theoretical framework that has the flexibility to accommodate the types of links that Price-Mars and Ramos were themselves attempting to formulate.²

It is my aim to show the affinities and the direct associations, both thematically and stylistically, between the autoethnographic texts of Price-Mars and Ramos and the

² “Literary anthropology” is defined by Poyatos as “the anthropologically-oriented use of the narrative literatures of...cultures (and, in a lesser degree, their theater, chronicles and travel accounts)... [Fernando Poyatos, 1988].
development of the Roman Indigéniste in Haiti and the Romance Regionalista or Romance Sertanejo (as it is sometimes designated) in Brazil. The two literary movements share much in the way that they seek to promote a source for national identity: the backlands, where the peasant is presented as the repository of an ascribed and presumed authenticity. The novels of such writers as Jorge Amado, Jacques Roumain, Graciliano Ramos, Jean-Baptiste Cinéaste and others studied here seek to emulate ethnographic ways of telling, and as we shall see, each author experiments stylistically, exemplifying the notion that there is not one correct way to “do” ethnography.

Literary anthropology requires a shift of focus from plot analysis alone to the reflective nature of the text, the ways it seeks to portray the particularities of the culture depicted in its pages: the use of linguistic register, the choice of symbols and the way these are experienced and understood by the characters, the utilization of embedded intertextual references (such as folktales, music, adages, etc.), the author’s attempts at providing “local color.” These are, in fact, among the types of elements that the two ethnographers called for writers to utilize in attempts to reorient the national focus to domestic symbols.

Visual anthropology, as I apply it to the films studied here, seeks to cull “systems of meaning” from the way cinematic representations are structured; that is, how they function as a means of cultural production. Narrative and documentary film are, in this context, on equal footing in terms of the opportunities they afford for cultural studies. Visual anthropology relies on the viewer’s ability to decode the visual text, although there is usually an over-reliance on the authoritative perspective of the ethnographer. With the increased sophistication of spectators both in the knowledge of the processes of
filmmaking and a raised awareness of other cultures, comes the greater possibility of multiple interpretation and personal response. A film such as Pereira dos Santos’s *Como era gostoso o meu francês* takes on an added dimension as it forces the viewer into active spectatorship. Linguistic distance which incorporates the Tupi language along with French and Portuguese in the soundtrack, the use of written text in the form of transcriptions as well as subtitles and abundant historical references are elements that require involved spectators. Both Brazilian and foreign audiences were thus challenged by the filmmaker who rejected a facile transparency, even for the home audience.

Clearly, the amount of engaged interaction on the part of the spectator is dependent on the level of identification possible with the filmic representation (this harks back to film theorist Christian Metz in his work, *The Imaginary Signifier*) (Metz). Avant-garde cinema exhibits the least likelihood of recognition particularly because it seeks to disorient the viewer from the familiar. With ethnographic film, the filmgoer relies on the on-site observer (and often narrator) who, unlike the spectator, is privy to the larger scenographic space (the realm that lies outside of the camera’s view and is therefore not onscreen). Much credit is given to the filmmaker who is presumably familiar with the language and customs of the place under investigation and is vested in making the spectator understand that which appears alien. Most often, ethnographic film seeks to close the gap of understanding exploited by Avant-garde cinema.

What impact do such issues as received filmic portrayals (both in narrative and documentary cinemas) have on the domestic psyche? Can this be gauged in a tangible manner? In the context of film history, what mechanisms available to domestic filmmakers in developing countries allow them to engage in the production of alternative
models? These preoccupations, alongside those regarding literary anthropology orient my reading of the texts with an awareness of the strategies at play in ethnographic expression, specific intertextual references and the political contexts embedded in the works along with those events surrounding their production and reception. In an attempt to deal with the multiple facets such questions present, a framework flexible enough to accommodate the various perspectives is necessary. In a manner that reflects the hybrid nature of the texts discussed here, a methodology that draws from Cultural Studies and Interpretive Anthropology, Film Studies and Literary Criticism frames the parameters for this research project.

Availing myself of such concepts as anthropologist Clifford Geertz’s “thick description” (the analysis of the multiplicity of structures of signification and the layers of interpretation delimited within a specific culture) and a rather focalized use of anthropologist Dennis Tedlock’s articulation of ethnopoetics (I am using the term here to mean the poetics of a culture that focuses on ethnic particularity within a larger construct of universals), as well as ethnographer James Clifford’s writings on the intersections between anthropology, ethnography and literature, I will investigate the ways in which ethnography, autoethnography and literature operated concurrently in the construction of a cultural identity in Haiti and in Brazil and how the dynamics of this polysemy remain a viable discursive strategy. The work of Stuart Hall on the issue of representation, particularly regarding media and cultural signification, is indispensable to this study.

Anthropologist Paul Rabinow, reflecting on the subject of representation states “We do not need a theory of indigenous epistemologies or a new epistemology of the

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3 I include films in this category with the caveat that they are complex texts which go beyond the written word and one is able to do more than just read them.
other […] the task is to show how and when and through what cultural and institutional means other people started claiming epistemology for their own” (Rabinow 241). One aspect of this project is to reflect upon Rabinow’s statement by examining the role of Brazilian and Haitian individuals and institutions during the formative years of the Modern State and the creation of a cultural as well as a national identity which contested the findings and interpretations made by foreign observers. The claiming of the right to self-definition gave rise to competing visions, although this did not preclude points of intersection.

The fieldwork tradition of ethnographic methodology is an interactive endeavor that relies heavily on the transmission of codes (from native informant to observer, from ethnographer to audience) into a translatable set of symbols. Often, these codes are oral; at other times they are visual. Setting aside questions of scientific objectivity for the moment, it is the role of the ethnographer to comprehend the cultural symbols encoded by the informant at the time of the exchange. A ritual, for example, is untranscribable in its totality. The ethnographer must first decipher (decode) the symbols of the event that the informant describes into linguistic or visual components, then translate (re-encode) these symbols into words or cinematic shots (the shot being the most reductive visual element in film). These symbols are yet again decoded by the consumers of the ethnographic monograph or film, according to their own experiences, biases, perspectives. It is a layering of translations, from one language into another (for example, Portuguese into English), one modality into another (from oral into written text or film language) oftentimes transmitted from one culture to another. Ethnographies, despite their scientific inclinations, are highly literary works as dependent on the ethnographer’s
stylistic artistry in turning a phrase as any fictional work. The ethnographer, after all, has an ideal consumer of the monograph in mind and will write in a manner meant to reach that audience. All of these complexities are summed up by James Clifford who notes, “[e]thnography, a hybrid activity...appears as writing, as collecting, as modernist collage, as imperial power, as subversive critique” (Clifford 1988, 11).

In light of post-modern ethnography’s questioning of scientific objectivity in general and of the observer’s reliability in particular, significant to this study are the ways in which Brazil and Haiti (as national entities and through the collective efforts of individuals) mounted challenges to traditional methods of ethnography at the start of the twentieth century; how social scientists and writers dealt with the tensions between objectivity, subjectivity, science, interpretation and the politics of representation; how ethnography and autoethnography in particular influenced methods of cultural representation in literature and film and how innovations in methodology are reflected in the works.

When considering film, one must be aware of the medium’s peculiar complexity, the fact that it is comprised of visual and aural components, perhaps even inscribed with a textual element such as subtitles. All this must then be contextualized so that “foreign” concepts can be reformulated into an intelligible discourse with recognizable/identifiable symbols that encourage meaningful or even multiple readings on the part of the spectator. In addition, the codes are neither random nor value-neutral. They occur in a political milieu (to which the ethnographer is highly attuned), and are subjectively chosen to accommodate a variety of factors as well as to serve a rhetorical function.
In an essay entitled “Encoding, Decoding,” cultural studies scholar Stuart Hall discusses the “circulation circuit or loop” through which communication and discursive practices pass. Hall states “there is no intelligible discourse without the operation of a code” (Hall 1990, 128-131). In the context of the Americas, and more particularly in the case of Haiti and Brazil for the purposes of this study, the interplay of encoding and decoding involves shared as well as exclusive symbols. Certain elements are recognizable as traces of the comparable history of colonial encounters; others are obscure in that they belong to the particularities of a local mélange hardly decipherable without the aid of one versed in the code. In the context of ethnographic discourse, the skill of meaningful decoding is a dialogical exchange that relies on the depth of cultural knowledge of the informant, the observer and the reader.

At the textual level, this project is also a study of the rhetorical stylings of fictional works (written and filmic), and how they approximate the discursive strategies of ethnographic monographs or documentaries in structure and form. At the narrative level, it looks at authorial voice, implied readership and manifestations of culture markers. In looking specifically at Brazil and Haiti in a comparative manner, I also seek out ways in which the scholarship is illustrative of Vèvè Clark’s concept of “diaspora literacy” which she describes in the following manner:

Diaspora literacy defines the reader’s ability to comprehend the literatures of Africa, Afro-America, and the Caribbean from an informed, indigenous perspective…It is a skill for both narrator and reader which demands a knowledge of historical, social, cultural, and political development generated by lived and textual experience. Throughout the twentieth century, diaspora literacy has implied an ease and intimacy with more than one language, with interdisciplinary relations among history, ethnology, and the folklore of regional expression (Clark 42).
The pan-Africanist, multilingual, indigenous and transnational scholarship of Price-Mars and Ramos exemplifies the desire to understand the regional implications of post-colonial cultural development, of historical processes at work and their impact on forging national identities and pan-American particularity. Their work is also representative of the willingness to engage in creating a cross-cultural framework for gauging similitude and difference, providing a reference point for extracting that which is specific from that which is generic.

Telling and transcribing/recording are fundamental elements in the work of the ethnographer whether choosing to write or to film, but they are also key narrative structures in cultural representation and national identity. The work of the auto-ethnographer also relies on a certain fluidity in understanding the idiosyncrasies of cultural identity, an aspect not lost on Ramos and Price-Mars. In the introduction of Auto/Ethnography: Rewriting the Self and the Social, editor Reed-Danahy provides and expands upon Mary Louise Pratt’s definition of autoethnography:

[T]he autoethnographer is a boundary-cropper and the role can be characterized as that of a dual identity… [articulated in] late 19th century ideas of “double consciousness”…. Pratt defines autoethnography as: a text in which people undertake to describe themselves in ways that engage with representations others have made of them… autoethnographic texts are not, then, what are usually thought of as autochthonous or “authentic” forms of self-representation…Rather they involve a selective collaboration with indigenous idioms to create self-representations intended to intervene in metropolitan modes of understanding…. [there are] methodological issues of doing an ethnography “at home,” given the long-standing tradition in this discipline of studying “others”…. Autoethnography is defined as a form of self-narrative that places the self within a social context. It is both a method
Price-Mars and Ramos were certainly boundary-crossers, not merely with respect to their travels and unorthodox blending of genres, but also due to their “selective collaboration” as Reed-Danahy puts it, with their colleagues and with their synthesizing of different forms of gnosis. Their intervention marks an insightful moment in the evolution of our understanding of the limits and possibilities of ethnology. Certainly, they sought to fill perceived knowledge gaps in each of their respective metropolitan centers, by formulating the national type as a composite made up of the urban citizen who could no longer afford to deny his or her rural “other” self. Price-Mars and Ramos positioned themselves as intermediaries: between the nation and the international community; within their respective borders; between the social classes; between the urban and the rural populations.

For anthropologists George Marcus and Dick Cushman,

> [e]thnographic realism...is a mode of writing that seeks to represent the reality of a whole world or form of life... realist ethnographies are written to allude to a whole by means of parts or foci of analytical attention which constantly evoke a social and cultural totality. [W]hat gives the ethnographer authority and the text a pervasive sense of concrete reality is the writer’s claim to represent a world as only one who has known it first-hand can, which thus forges an intimate link between ethnographic writing and fieldwork (Marcus & Cushman 1982, 29).

The idea of a “concrete” reality, whether or not the ethnographer comes from a culture different than the one under investigation, is wholly problematic, as it suggests an element of impenetrability, of fixity, of a permanent coalescence that hinders the possibility of flux, of porosity, of absorption. However, the attempt of the ethnographer
to “capture” a reality that is representative, to render translucent what is opaque is indeed the basis for the undertaking of ethnographic study. Certainly, the pervasive claims of authenticity in the early part of the twentieth century pointed to ethnography as a bulwark and foundation. What makes Ramos and Price-Mars interesting in view of Marcus & Cushman’s articulation of ethnographic realism is precisely the notion of seeking to comprehend the whole by analyzing a myriad of parts in varying contexts.

In “Culture as Identity: An Anthropologist’s View,” Anthony Cohen states: “Culture is a matter less for documentation than for interpretation; it is more faithfully and sensitively depicted in metaphor than in museums” (Cohen 1993, 207). In the following chapters, we will see the role that writers (who craft metaphor) and institutions (that deal in documentation) have played in the dissemination of culture, and how disputes over the meanings and uses of such documents escalated in both countries at about the same time. This sanctioning of cultural symbols by institutions does not belie Cohen’s notion that representation is largely within the realm of metaphor, as such images find their expression in the collective consciousness. Documents that are found to be worthy of preservation attract any number of interpretations, written or otherwise, regarding their value.

However, those symbols lying outside the realm of institutions (the peasant being one) are fertile ground for giving rise to interpretations that are recognizable to the collectivity. The Roman Indigéniste idealizes the peasant (paysan), and portrays him as the standard bearer of all that is unspoiled by Western influence, the repository of the essence of the nation, the intermediary who provides the “modern” Haitian with a link to a mythic African past and the country a catalyst for change. The Romance Regionalista
presents us with the *sertanejo*, a peasant of Brazil’s northeast interior, whose metaphoric identity changes over time from an idealized and mythic figure of Brazilianness to a rough and retrograde symbol of Brazilian underdevelopment in the face of progress, and then into a symbol of resistance and fortitude (the latter appearing in the context of a dictatorship, beginning with Gêulio Vargas and continuing through the military regime). The Haitian figure of the rural *Caco*, a symbol of rebellion, most particularly during the American Occupation, corresponds in many ways to the Brazilian figure of the *Cangaceiro*, a rural rebel (or outlaw, depending on one’s point of view) of the northern interior or *cangaço*. These two latter figures shift between being representative of resistance or of lawlessness in the works of historians and sociologists. In literary works, the *paysan/sertanejo* is adopted as a metaphorical figure of contested national identity but also becomes somewhat stereotypical with repeated use.

Some have posited the notion that the regionalist novel was merely a reaction on the part of writers seeking an authentic, “native” voice in response to the encroachment of modernism and modernity. This is not entirely the case, as in some fundamental ways, the regionalist novelists addressed (whether implicitly or explicitly), the possibilities that modernity afforded the hinterland as well as the pressures it brought to bear. In addition, such a clear delineation obscures the fact that the modernist authors also sought to present a notion of authenticity, despite utilizing different strategies to do so. Furthermore, both the Regionalists and the Modernists experimented with literary modernism and its diversification of style.

What is of primary importance to me in these and the other works I discuss here are the narrative strategies utilized by the authors and questions regarding representation
as they relate to cultural and national identity; the framing of the debates about culture as
they are expressed in the texts themselves as well as what the authors have had to say
about their work and that of others. I seek to make a comparative study of the way in
which Haitian and Brazilian authors appropriated ethnographic methodology (many of
the Brazilian Regionalists, for example, boasted of going out into the world of the
nordestino peasantry to conduct observations), and the ways in which the characters are
meant to embody a particular aspect that the authors want to highlight. The Indigenists
and the Regionalists insisted that their novels were a reflection of reality rather than an
imagined creation, which was the preferred method of the Modernists, who looked at new
forms of expression as an outlet for their visions of cultural identity and a national
ethnopoetics.

The surrealist aspects of the work of Andrade and Depestre provide an
opportunity to explore the ways in which their understanding of ethnography attempts to
reveal perceived truths through the use of symbolism, imagery, language, shifting
identities and humanistic universals. The creative blending of fact and fiction by these
two authors may be considered a precursor to the ethnofiction (a Rouchian term, cf
chapter 4) films of Carlos Diégues such as Quilombo or Jac Avila’s Krik? Krak!, both
discussed in depth later.

My interests in these and the other works present in this project are 1) the
interplay of realism/surrealism in Regionalist and Indigenist fiction as well as in
documentary and narrative cinema that emphasize representations of cultural or historical
events and the extent to which ethnographic methodology influences style; 2) the notion
that it is in the backlands, an insular space far from the metropolitan centers (temporally,
developmentally as well as geographically), that the “authentic” character of the nation is to be found; 3) the antagonisms that erupted between politics and culture, especially the attempted suppression or manipulation by the State of certain aspects of popular culture. In other words, the way literature mediates identity between individual citizens and the world, and between the population and a collective sense of cultural heritage.

The preceding criteria will be addressed in the context of James Clifford’s scheme of ethnographic methodology: “Ethnographic writing is determined in at least six ways: 1) contextually (it draws from and creates meaningful social milieux); 2) rhetorically (it uses and is used by expressive conventions; 3) institutionally (one writes within, and against specific traditions, disciplines and audiences); 4) generically (an ethnography is usually distinguishable from a novel or a travel account); 5) politically (the authority to represent cultural realities is unequally shared and at times contested); 6) historically (all the above conventions and constraints are changing)” (Clifford 6). The challenge is to see where there is significant overlap in the stylistic preferences of representation and the choice and function of symbols; to compare and contrast the political environment governing the overriding social system; the stylistic choices of individual authors and their adherence to or departure from traditional literary genres.

In “Against Ethnography” Nicholas Thomas calls for:

A new kind of post-ethnographic anthropological writing [that] would presume the sort of local knowledge that has always been critical for representing circumstances both at home and abroad, but would refuse the bounds of conveniently sized localities through venturing to speak about regional relations and histories […] What I’m suggesting… is a form of analysis that uses a regional frame to argue about processes of social change and diversity, in a succession of European representations of such places, that develops its arguments strategically and
provisionally rather than universally […] Difference is thus historically constituted rather than a fact of cultural stability (Thomas 316-317).

This project is a contribution to the inter-regional relational analysis that Thomas and others call for and it is a continuation of the type of work pioneered by Ramos and Price-Mars, who sought out a global context for gauging domestic difference. The appeal of such research is its potential for expanding the existing body of work that studies Haiti and Brazil comparatively beyond the overriding focus on religious studies.

Such regional relations and histories already figure heavily in the works of Price-Mars and Ramos who engaged in this sort of ethnographic writing as a means of articulating local knowledge in a broader regional framework, problematizing accepted conventions. Since they practiced ethnography while the discipline itself was still in its formative years, there is less of an adherence to one specific anthropological theoretical framework. My intention is to utilize Thomas’ notion of “a regional frame to argue about processes of social change,” comparing the cultivation of symbols as commodities of cultural currency and how these came about in Haiti and Brazil. The undertaking of a comparative study of these two nations is particularly interesting in the context of Latin American Studies, since they are both at the margins of what is generally understood as Latinity in the hemisphere and because of the certain degree of linguistic isolation that the two nations experience. Certainly, language is a key element in the cohesion of a two-tiered identity that encompasses nation and culture, and it is not coincidental that language is at the fore of the debate of what constitutes a national literature in both Haiti and Brazil, beginning at about the time that Price-Mars and Ramos are investigating the elements that comprise national culture.
In *Culture and Imperialism*, Edward Said states: “The concept of the national language is central, but without the practice of a national culture – from slogans to pamphlets and newspapers, from folktales and heroes to epic poetry, novels, and drama – the language is inert; national culture organizes and sustains communal memory…” (Said 1993, 215). As we shall see, language plays an important role, both in revealing and in concealing cultural norms; it is a source of unification and division feeding polemical debates about language itself, but it is folklore that provides a fundamental key for both Price-Mars and Ramos. Clearly, the emphasis on culture as *practice* is what links such artists as Andrade, Depestre, Cinéaste, Deren, Rouch, Roumain, Pereira dos Santos and the others represented in this project to the theoreticians such as Price-Mars and Ramos (and others), who study culture primarily as a *structure*. But to varying degrees, each must deal with the issue of language on some level, be it textual or filmic, as well as political context and these matters enrich the focus of this project in allowing one to study the impact of ethnography on narrative modes of telling.

I begin in chapter one with a comparative exploration of the influence of the ethnographic writings of Dr. Jean Price-Mars (1876-1969) of Haiti and Dr. Arthur Ramos (1903-1949) of Brazil, in the dissemination of cultural symbols and how these in particular, as well as elements of ethnographic methodology in general were appropriated by writers (chapters two and three) and later by filmmakers (chapter four), in each of these countries. Chapter one will explore these issues in depth, beginning with the development of Price-Mars’s and Arthur Ramos’s questioning of accepted ideas and their search for ways to articulate their perceptions. What this collaborative effort (I use the
term with a maximum of restraint) between the two researches shows is that the purported isolation of these two nations has been an overstated assumption.

Chapters two and three juxtapose the literary heritage of Naturalism and Romanticism exhibited by the regionalist writers with the advent of modernist writing in Haiti and Brazil. Chapter two is a comparative study of the *Romance Nordestino* and the *Roman Indigéniste*, where the analysis will include placing them contextually and conceptually within their respective cultures as well as framing them in the larger sphere of comparative literature. This will serve to highlight the similarities and divergences in their developmental relation to Romanticism as well as to each other. A study of the competing forces at work in the development of national symbols shows how fluid such interpretations are and how entrenched in political ideology the debates about signification were, often pitting writers and scholars against the State and the Church.

As much as possible, I attempt to avoid reading these and other texts strictly along political lines (I do not discuss the Marxist/Communist politics of some of the writers in great detail, as I feel it would lead too far afield), though I do address the import of political realities at the time that the authors are writing. For example, I do not treat what others have persuasively described as the utopian socialism depicted in Jacques Roumain’s *Gouverneurs de la rosée*; nor do I delve into the astute and implicit social critique of government failings found in Graciliano Ramos’s *Vidas Secas* though I bear in mind (as Reed-Danahy posits), that “[t]he postmodern/postcolonial conception of self and society is one of a multiplicity of identities, of cultural displacement, and of shifting axes of power” (Reed-Danahy 2). It is the echo of the ethnographic monograph and the strong element of cultural fore-grounding that is the focus of our interest here. I seek out the
ways in which ethnography and narrative structure are reformulated into a specific genre of writing that is directly linked to the work of Price-Mars, Ramos and other anthropologists and the implications of the significant shift in both style and content which alter the sociocultural landscape of Brazil and Haiti.

In chapter three I undertake close readings of two examples of modernist fiction, Mário de Andrade’s *Macunaíma* and René Depestre’s *Le Mât de cocagne* and deliberate on the importance of language, genre and the subversive aims of the texts. Issues of race, political history, immigration, religion and artistic freedom are some of the elements found in both works. The extent to which we may attribute the stylistic and structural evolution of the genres to the discussion of ethnography taking place in the first half of the twentieth century is relevant here. I argue that ethnography provides these authors a means of escaping genre even as it allows them to focus on culture in a manner that is distinct from the regionalist novelists studied in chapter two. Andrade and Depestre engage in a dialectic of rupture and synthesis, fusing together disparate elements, forcing us to contemplate different manifestations of hybridity and creolization.

Chapter four is a study of cinematic expression in light of the premises of visual anthropology and the efforts of the filmmakers to address specific sociocultural symbols. By analyzing the premises of documentary filmmaking and our understanding of ethnographic cinema in particular, I attempt to look at the ways in which the generic constraints of narrative and documentary cinema are diminished. The films chosen represent different styles, but all reflect a keen concern with cultural representation and historicity. Contextualizing the films within the local developments as well as within the larger sphere of film history, I look at how certain conventions and innovations were
adapted to suit the visions of the respective filmmakers. Finally, I look at the extent to which the films represent a continuity with the written texts that preceded them as well as their position within the history of film itself. The complexities of domestic cinematic production as opposed to films made by foreigners that are so closely tied to the nation that they are considered part of that nation’s “film identity” are marginally dealt with here, primarily because these are questions that are worthy of deeper analyses than this study will allow. Few will deny that Deren’s *Divine Horsemen* (included here) is part of Haiti’s film repertoire, though the film is made by a Russian-American woman, yet there is a polemical debate surrounding whether French filmmaker Marcel Camus’s *Orfeu negro* (not included here) should be considered a Brazilian film. What is central to my study of the films are the nuanced differences between narrative and documentary cinema, postmodern and autoethnographic style and ethnographic rigor or a departure from it.

Before moving on to Jean Price-Mars and Arthur Ramos, a bit of background concerning the political situation of Haiti and that of Brazil is necessary. The dynamic forces at play both at home and on the international stage set the tone for the initial musings of the two ethnographers and eventually for the novelists as well. It is important to understand the context of the changes taking place in the sociopolitical sphere and the effects that these had on the understanding of culture and its significance in the forging of an identity that sometimes was absorbed into the notion of a national culture, sometimes ran counter to it.
Historical Contexts

The decade encompassing 1915 to 1925 is significant in the cultural development of Haiti and Brazil as it is around this time that concerted efforts to define and reflect upon the cultural processes at work in these societies became prominent. If the tenor of the times in Europe was despair and conflict brought on by World War I, in the Americas, Haiti and Brazil were swept into a mood of meditative questioning as each nation confronted change. In 1915 the United States Marine Corps intervened in Haiti by beginning a sixteen-year occupation in response to inner conflict on the island as well as global concerns such as perceived German influence in the hemisphere. In 1922 in the midst of political revolts and social upheaval, Brazil celebrated the centennial of its nationhood and witnessed the *Semana de Arte Moderna* in São Paulo. These coeval developments, quite different in their socio-political contexts and intentions, nevertheless sparked a comparable introspection into the constitution of national identity in each country. Each event in its way brought to the fore the reality of fundamental changes, of irrevocable rupture with the past and of an uncertain, if inevitable, future.

The confrontation with modernity, albeit under such different circumstances, instigated an era of self-conscious contemplation. In his study on Latin American modernisms, *Hybrid Cultures*, Nestor García Canclini states that “cultural modernism, instead of being denationalizing, has given impulse to, and the repertory of symbols for, the construction of national identity” (Canclini 52). The search for tangible symbols took on a new urgency in the early part of the twentieth century. Haiti, independent since 1804, faced what the majority of its nationals considered the ultimate catastrophe: the loss of sovereignty. Brazil, a Republic since 1822, having abolished slavery in 1888,
sought ways in which to define this independence from Portugal and to assimilate its varied population into one entity: the Brazilian. I cite Canclini again: “The most intense preoccupation with “Brazilianess” begins with the Vanguards of the 1920s” (Canclini 52). At the fore of this vanguard were such figures as writers Oswald de Andrade, Mário de Andrade (no relation), ethnomusicologist and composer Heitor Villalobos, sociologist Gilberto Freyre and ethnographer Arthur Ramos.

At the start of the twentieth century, each country sought to individuate its essence and define its national character in the midst of an identity crisis. Brazilians wrestled with the notion of “universal” Brazilianness, most famously articulated by Gilberto Freyre’s positing of his nation’s racial democracy. Haiti attempted to negotiate a dual identity comprised of two distinct societies: representing itself as a refuge for peoples of African ascendance to the outside world, while embracing an ideal of Frenchness within its borders. The occupation by the American Marines proved paradoxically destabilizing. On one hand the military maintained order (by staving off a rebellion by Caco guerrillas and backing a collaborative government), while on the other hand instigating a psychic malaise that bred a seething resentment both among the general population and a percentage of the elite. The self-interrogation of Haitian identity, although made acute by the U.S. presence, had begun well ahead of 1915. Eight years prior to the Occupation, the definition of who was considered Haitian was constitutionally amended: « Par la loi du 22 août 1907, la possibilité d’acquérir la nationalité haïtienne ne sera plus réservée aux seuls Africains et Indiens mais deviendra accessible à tous » [By the law of the 22nd of August 1907, the ability to acquire Haitian nationality will no longer be solely reserved for Africans and Indians but will become
accessible to all] (Laroche 62). A later law also made it possible for foreigners to own land for the first time in the nation’s history. These two amendments to the Constitution led to an influx of immigrants from Europe, the Middle East and elsewhere who could legally become Haitian.

In an article on the contemporary politics of representation in Haiti, Julie Heath sums up the effort to (re-)define Haitian identity, a reaction to the influx of foreign influence at the time of the Occupation:

In response to [U.S.] race-based theorizing and to the United States military occupation of Haiti between 1915 and 1934, Haitian intellectuals undertook concerted efforts to investigate and reclaim Haiti’s African heritage and native folk traditions...the Haitian folklore revival contributed to the stimulation of national coherence and pride through its emphasis on vernacular culture as a distinctly national heritage. Revivalists drew upon the symbolic richness of traditional customs and imagery, including Vodou, in constructing resonant depictions of a people unified in nationhood (Heath 24).

As we shall see shortly, Price-Mars’s *Ainsi parla l’oncle* was instrumental in instigating the revival that Heath writes of, as well as the interest in the quotidian existence of the general population. Jean Jonnassaint points to the lack of novels that appear during the period prior to the publication of the ethnographer’s work (Jonassaint 95). Shortly thereafter, novelist Jacques Roumain’s *La Montagne ensorcellée* (1931) [The Enchanted Mountain], revolutionized the Haitian novel by innovatively integrating autoethnography and narrative technique. The shift in theme, which predominantly concerns peasant life, marked the profound influence that Price-Mars has had on Haitian literature, provoking an awakening among the elite, to an obscured past in danger of being forgotten:
In Haiti, as in the French Antilles, the elite finds itself split between a Franco-Antillean cultural patrimony to the exclusion of elements recalling Africa, while the leaders of the Antillean Renaissance will seek to unearth and highlight this past of which we are ashamed and those links with Africa of which we can later be proud.

Concurrent with this period of soul-searching is the evolution of ethnology into a scholarly discipline separate from the larger field of anthropology.

If anthropology can be said to be the study of the human in its environment, ethnology is specifically the sub-category that studies cultures comparatively, with ethnography being its practice as well as its textual form. The ethnic mix of cultures in contact in the Americas presented ethnologists with a fecund area for research (as it continues to do today). The enigmatic nature of its product, the hybrid (in the form of the mulatto or the mestizo or syncretic religions for example), inspired all manner of exoticist theorizing and problematized accepted cultural models and notions of race. Sensationalist travelogues, whose popularity baffled the famed anthropologist Claude Lévi-Strauss, were a byproduct of the insistence of an otherworldly alterity.

With the growing anthropological interest in Africa (as evidenced by the influential Paris-Dakar mission undertaken by anthropologist Marcel Griaule (1931-
1933), as well as the fascination with what can be termed “black culture” in general (the Harlem Renaissance, the success of Josephine Baker in Paris, the appropriations of African art forms by practitioners of Modern Art are some examples), the lack of knowledge regarding African cultures sparked a new curiosity in anthropology, helping to define and advance the discipline, as an insistence on objectivity became a staple of the discipline’s methodology.

With respect to the Americas, the nebulous discourse surrounding African cultures became enmeshed with the vague understanding of indigenous Amerindian cultures and what emerged as viewed through the European gaze was an object that despite Western “scientific” scrutiny remained inscrutably “other.” By the first quarter of the twentieth century, however, in tandem with the influence of the liberating tendencies of modernist literature, a more self-referential thematic rooted itself in the works of social scientists and literati alike.

The nineteenth-century revolutions that occurred in Latin America and the nationalist movements that followed set the course for self-definition. In Haiti, the motto “L’Union fait la force” [unity is strength], proved perpetually elusive in the political sphere. The American Occupation brought to the fore the perils of the island nation’s divisive politics. Brazil adopted “Ordem e Progresso” [Order and Progress] and has sought to negotiate its Third World status with its First World aspirations since independence. 5 The contentious and often polemical debates about the symbols of

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5 This motto is drawn from the Positivism of French philosopher Auguste Comte (1798-1857). The doctrine of Positivism calls for the reorganization of society based on a synthesis of the intellect and morality. Society will be perfected (Progress) only when the intellect is subordinate to the heart (Order). This creates a Positive system, where the heart regulates the intellect, a moral check that impedes the “inhumanity” of Pure Reason.
national identity reflect Saïd’s observation: “In time, culture comes to be associated, often aggressively, with the nation or state; this differentiates ‘us’ from ‘them,’ almost always with some degree of xenophobia. Culture in this sense is a source of identity, and a rather combative one at that” (Said 1993, xiii). Ramos and Price-Mars both have had their detractors as well as their admirers, and the constitution of national identity and culture is far from static: symbols gain or lose a certain relevancy over time, sometimes being replaced altogether.

The following chapter presents a close reading of the correspondence between the two ethnographers as well as of their scholarly texts in order to situate their work historically. Their understanding of the emerging discipline of ethnography and their influence on its methodology in Latin America as well as their discussions of foundational texts helped to shape the regional studies undertaken by “native” scholars. The letters provide insight into the dissemination of ideas among the intellectual community, with an exchange of information spanning three continents. In my analysis of Price-Mars and Ramos, I bear in mind Reed-Danahy’s assertion that “autoethnography has been assumed to be more ‘authentic’ than straight ethnography. The voice of the insider is assumed to be truer than that of the outsider in much current debate….Double identity and insider/outsider are constructs too simplistic for an adequate understanding of the processes of representation and power” (Reed-Danahy 2). With Ramos and Price-Mars, I present their negotiation of the issues of autoethnography within the context of when they were writing as well as the lasting implications of their endeavors. As we shall see, the opposition implied in the scheme insider/outsider between ethnography and autoethnography is more complex than the neat division suggests.
The aim of Price-Mars and of Ramos is to discredit those erroneous positions taken up by outsiders, not the discipline of ethnology itself. The endeavor is to exploit their position as insiders in order to get at what they believe is the truth of their respective cultures. But their own backgrounds predispose them to an interpretation of culture that is in part illustrative of the privileged vantage point from which they examine questions of race, culture, national identity and the pan-Africanist project, a position which underscores Clifford’s assertion that “Ethnographic truths are… inherently partial – committed and incomplete” (Clifford 1986, 7).
Chapter 1: Reaching Back for the Future: Price-Mars, Ramos and the Autoethnographic Enterprise

What is important are the significant breaks – where old lines of thought are disrupted, older constellations displaced, and elements, old and new, are regrouped around a different set of premises and themes.

—Stuart Hall

In April of 1936, Haitian ethnographer, Dr. Jean Price-Mars writes to Brazilian ethnographer Dr. Arthur Ramos in order to congratulate him on his recent work, *O Negro Brasileiro*, characterized by Price-Mars as “*cette importante contribution à l’étude des problèmes de la transplantation nègre dans le nouveau monde...*” [this important contribution to the study of black migration in the New World] (Price-Mars April 1936).6 He confesses his rudimentary knowledge of Portuguese, yet because of his strong interest in “*tout ce qui se publie sur ces matières et qui soit susceptible d’apporter quelques lumières à la solution de ces questions troubles et incertaines...*” [all things published on these matters and which may shed light on these uncertain and troubling questions], Price-Mars makes the effort to “understand a large part of the tome” (Price-Mars April 1936). He also takes the opportunity to send the Brazilian ethnographer a signed copy of his own study on Haitian folklore, *Ainsi parla l’oncle*, published in 1928, thus initiating a dialogue that focuses on contemporary inter-hemispheric research.

In this initial letter, Price-Mars acknowledges his ancestry as a descendant of those transplanted blacks and alludes to the role of the ethnographer: « *Descendant, de ce

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6 (Unless otherwise noted, all translations are my own.)
côté-ci des Antilles, de ces esclaves libérés par le génie de mes ancêtres, je suis moi aussi, penché sur ces problèmes avec un enthousiasme qui n’exclut ni l’objectivité de l’observateur impartial ni la justice du moraliste irréductible » [A descendant, from this side of the Antilles, of those slaves liberated by the genius of my ancestors, I am myself also pursuing these problems with an enthusiasm that neither excludes the objectivity of the impartial observer, nor the justice of the irreducible moralist (emphasis added)]

(Price-Mars April 1936).

Price-Mars’s statements show that he is keenly aware of the tendency toward subjectivity that ethnography inheres. As we shall see in this and the following chapters, the formation of cultural identity entails conscious decisions as well as fortuitous occurrences. Attempting to affix meaning to radical symbols is a challenging enterprise, as semioticians point out. Objectivity and impartiality, the stated premises of anthropological methodology are what both Price-Mars and Ramos aspire to, but also the very things they question in the body of ethnographic works that they encounter. However, both men espouse a view that cultural understanding is vital to the attainment of a just society and there is an ever-present element of social consequence in their research. Their respective and collaborative undertakings and their individualistic approaches to ethnographic methodology demonstrate inclinations that conform to Stuart Hall’s articulation on “‘cultural identity’ – critical points of deep and significant difference which constitute ‘what we really are’; or rather since history has intervened – ‘what we have become’…become as well as being – belongs to the future as much as to the past” (Hall 2000, 111). The ethnography of Price-Mars as well as that of Ramos is dualistic in nature; it looks backwards in a search for clues to the present in an effort to
refute erroneous hypotheses and is also forward thinking in that it seeks to establish a solid foundation for future research.

Responding to the April 1936 letter in July of the same year, Arthur Ramos informs Price-Mars that *Ainsi parla l’oncle* is of great interest and use to him. He goes on to state that up until reading the work, he knew of few references on Haitian *vodu*: Dr. Justin Dorsainvil’s *Névrose et Vodou* (1931) (which Price-Mars later sends to him) and American writer William Seabrook’s *The Magic Island* (1929) (in a subsequent book, Ramos cites the 1930 Spanish translation, published in Madrid). The latter title, though not named in Ramos’ letter, is a work of some notoriety, a fact Price-Mars laments in his essay “Le Bilan des études ethnologiques en Haïti,” which I will discuss shortly.

The aforementioned letter also indicates the forwarding of *O Folklore Negro do Brasil*, Ramos’ most recent work, on which he would like Price-Mars’s “opinion autorisée” [authoritative opinion]. The content of the body of letters shows the mutual appreciation of thorough bibliographic references shared by the two researchers, an important basis for future correspondence over several years. The exchange of information and ideas characterizes the relationship between Ramos and Price-Mars, both of whom trained as medical doctors, later finding their way to the evolving discipline of Ethnography. The desire to keep abreast of the latest research in pan-African ethnography prompts Ramos to send the work of his most prolific and well-known student, Edison Carneiro, to the Haitian ethnographer and Price-Mars’s son, Dr. Louis Price-Mars (like Ramos trained in psychiatry) also begins a correspondence of his own with the Brazilian researcher who has read the younger Price-Mars’s work.
In June of 1937, Price-Mars’s letter to Ramos indicates the forwarding of two recently published issues of the journal *Revue d’Histoire et de géographie d’Haïti*:

« Cette livraison contient la communication que j’ai faite en février sur vos œuvres et celles de l’école brésilienne d’Anthropo-sociologie. J’ai été heureux de rendre ce faible hommage aux travaux si dignes d’intérêt de la science brésilienne sur un problème ethnographique de la plus haute importance pour l’avenir de nos pays d’Amérique »

[This delivery contains the comments that I made in February on your works and those of the Brazilian School of Socio-Anthropology. I was happy to render this humble homage to works in the Brazilian sciences that are so worthy of interest concerning an ethnographic question of the utmost importance for the future of our American countries] (Price-Mars June 1937).  

Price-Mars also requests any publications from the afro-Brazilian Congress which took place in Rio de Janeiro in January of that year. The Haitian ethnographer ends the letter to his kindred spirit “votre très dévoué serviteur” [your very devoted servant], indicating the particular joy that he would have had in shaking Ramos’s hand.

A central figure in the dissemination of scholarly works in the social sciences at the time is Richard (Ricardo) Pattee. At one time a professor at the University of Puerto Rico, Río Piedras, and employed in the Division of Cultural Relations of the U. S. Department of State, Pattee’s correspondence with Ramos provides evidence that the former was pivotal in the circulation of ideas and organizing of events amongst Africanists in the hemisphere. The information contained in his letters to Ramos indicates Pattee’s centrality to the question of New World Africanism. Melville Herskovitz, Fernando Ortiz, Price-Mars, W. E. B. DuBois, are other contacts of Pattee’s, and whose

7 [The articles are published as “Le Cycle du nègre.”]
works he ensures that Ramos is either aware of or has in his possession. Pattee also
endeavors to bring the works of Brazilian social scientists to a wider audience, often
asking Ramos to send him information concerning the Brazilian’s colleagues, such as his
student Edison Carneiro, Gilberto Freyre, among others.

Ramos’s more profound knowledge of Haitian history comes about through Price-
Mars’s initiative in 1936 when he writes his colleague for the first time, eventually
sending his Brazilian counterpart a series of publications, but also through the work of
Pattee himself. In a letter to Ramos written in Río Piedras on March 31st 1937, Pattee
states:

Está anunciado em Haiti a proxima publicación dum estudo do Dr. Price-Mars sobre o problema “A propos de l’école brésilienne d’Anthropo-sociologie.” O Dr. Ortiz em Havana está prompto a publicar uma revista com o organo da Sociedade de Estudos Afro-cubanos. Vou enviar-lhe as notas no Journal of Negro History quando sairem. Tenho pensado para quando acabar o trabalho que estou realisando no atualidade escrever um sumario, de umas 300 paginas em lingua espanhola da historia ou a evolução do povo haitiano. Tenho muitos dados e creio a falta de um volume que seja um esboço da evolução da unica republica negra neste hemisferio não deixara de ter certo interesse. Recebeu V. Exca. o pequeno trabalho sobre o Haitiano Dessalines?°

[The upcoming publication of a study “On the Brazilian School of Anthropo-sociology” by Dr. Price-Mars has been announced in Haiti.” In Havana, Dr. Ortiz is ready to publish a journal with the Society of Afro-Cuban Studies. I will send you the notes in the Journal of Negro History when they appear. I thought that when I complete my

° Richard Pattee, letter to Ramos, March 31, 1937, Biblioteca Nacional, Rio De Janeiro, Brazil. In another letter dated July 8th, 1944, Pattee writes “Eu estou trabalhando em varias coisas, entre outras, um livro pequeno sobre Haiti que quero publicar aqui em lingua espanhola. Não ha nada fora de seu livro sobre as culturas negras no novo mundo em outra lingua que a francesa sobre este pais que tem um interesse enorme para mim” [I am working on a variety of things, among others, a small book on Haiti that I want to publish in Spanish. There is nothing apart from your work on black cultures in the new world, in a language other than French, on this country which is so enormously interesting to me.]
present work, I would write a summary of about 300 pages, in Spanish, on the history or the evolution of the Haitian people. I have a lot of facts and believe that a volume that is an overview of the evolution of the only black republic in this hemisphere should be of certain interest. Did you receive the brief work on the Haitian, Dessalines?]

At the time that Pattee is writing, there are a limited amount of sources on Haiti written in Spanish or Portuguese. In Brazil, a country where slavery existed as late as 1888, open discussion about the issue of emancipation during the events of 1791-1804 in Saint-Domingue was, for obvious reasons, taboo.

In an article discussing the Haitian Revolution and Brazil, Luiz Mott informs us that “Quanto à Revolução do Haiti, esta sim foi notícia comentada e temida em todo o mundo escravagista...os negros no Brasil estavam muito mais informados e em contacto com o “mundo exterior” do que até então se supunha...a coroação de Dessalines como Imperador do Haiti ocorreu em setembro de 1804...já em 1805 os militares negros do Rio de Janeiro, capital da Colônia, tivessem conhecimento e ostentassem ufanos a efigie do líder antilhano” [As for the Haitian Revolution, this was indeed noticed and spoken of and feared in the entire slave-holding world...the blacks in Brazil were much more informed and in contact with the “outside world” than was once supposed...Dessalines’s coronation as Emperor of Haiti took place in September of 1804...already in 1805, the black soldiers of Rio de Janeiro, the colonial capital, had knowledge of [the Revolution] and wore symbols and effigies of the Antillean leader] (Mott 57). The forced isolation of Haiti, however, would allow it to develop in an aura of insular particularism. The Occupation (1915-1934) served to inspire a certain curiosity about Haiti on the part of
researchers such as sociologists and ethnologists, interested in more than the island’s history.

The Making of Autoethnographers

Jean Price-Mars was born in 1876, in Grande-Rivière du Nord in northern Haiti. Undertaking studies in Port-au-Prince, Haiti and in France, Price-Mars would become one of his nation’s most illustrious intellectuals and diplomats. An acquaintance of Booker T. Washington, leader of the Haitian Mission to the Saint Louis World’s Fair in 1904, a Senator of the Republic, ambassador to various countries, director or chair of several institutes and university departments, Price-Mars is recognized as the elder scholar-statesman of Haiti, though his legacy is somewhat polemical, a fact succinctly stated by writer Jean Brierre:

[Some critics] accuse him of a neutrality born of calculations, dubious stratagems, ambiguous postures, lofty mandarin-like retreats, and a certain impermeability to anything which was neither history nor sociology. On the other side, they would like to lock him up in a stifling chapel, smother him in incense as though in some cultist shrine, far from the iconoclastic crowds as if, disembodied from birth, he had not been subject to the weaknesses and errors inherent in the human condition (Brierre 7).

Though few will dispute the relevance of Price-Mars in Haitian Letters, there are significant moments of ambiguity that fuel debates about his influence.

Magdaline Shannon, in her work on Price-Mars, informs us that “Price-Mars himself had resumed his medical studies in the capital [Port-au-Prince], but on free afternoons had begun a systematic investigation of peasant life in the mountains above Pétionville.... Price-Mars was beginning fieldwork in ethnology and ethnography...
[he]would often leave his study and ‘splendid’ library and could be found dressed in khaki, leather boots, and a sun-helmet...seeking specific knowledge of the customs and way of life of country folk” (Shannon 58-59). Price-Mars’s determination to do fieldwork illustrates a desire to adhere to the methodological rigors of traditional ethnography. But Shannon’s description also points out Price-Mars’s theatricality in dressing the part, immersing himself in the role of the outside observer, coding himself with what he considers the conventional trappings of the ethnographer. Despite a determined attempt to abide by the protocols of scientific exactitude, Price-Mars’s most famous work, *Ainsi parla oncle* [So Spoke the Uncle] straddles social science and literature.

No less controversial is Price-Mars’s Brazilian colleague Arthur Ramos. Born in Pilar, in the state of Alagoas located in northeastern Brazil, Ramos’s career mirrors that of Price-Mars’s in many ways. Scholar, professor, ethnographer, writer and diplomat, he was President of the Social Sciences Division of UNESCO, working in Paris at the time of his death in 1949. No one can dispute his erudition, nor deny his prolific productivity: “*Ao fazer concurso para a cadeira de Antropologia da Universidade do Brasil, em 1945, apresenta 1.234 títulos, 432 livros e artigos publicados, 96 cursos e conferências e 57 entrevistas*” [As a candidate for Chair of Anthropology at the University of Brasil in 1945, [Ramos’s CV] listed 1, 234 titles, 432 books and published articles, 96 courses and conferences and 57 interviews] (Villaça 27-29). In Brazilian scholarship on race relations, Ramos is viewed as somewhat of a rebel. In a series of articles eulogizing Ramos, recently published together in *Relambrando Arthur Ramos*, a colleague quotes Ramos as having stated “*Devemos evitar toda ortodoxia de escola*” [we must avoid all disciplinary orthodoxies] (Villaça 29).
Despite such an illustrious career, however, Ramos’s work remains largely unknown outside of Brazil. The following quote provides a potential clue as to the reason for Ramos’s marginalization: “Durante a guerra, Arthur Ramos se revelou um anti-racista combativo, em “Guerra e Relações de Raças,” 1943. Publica um manifesto contra o racismo, a 28 de agosto de 1942...As suas tendências polarizam-se na inclinação pelo estudo do comportamento humano em certas condições deficitárias de atuação: criança, o neurótico, as minorias étnicas, o alienado. Em suma, o desajustamento social e cultural [During the war, Arthur Ramos revealed himself as a militant anti-racist in “War and Race Relations,” 1943. He published a manifesto against racism the 28th of August 1942 . . . his tendencies polarized toward an inclination to study human behaviors in the context of certain deficient conditions: children, neurotics, ethnic minorities, the alienated. To sum up, the socially and culturally maladjusted] (Villaça 29). The title of Christine Ajuz’s contribution to the Sapacuia collection is very telling: “Um Antropólogo (quase) esquecido” [A (Partially) Concealed Anthropologist]. She recounts:

[N]enhuma solenidade marcará hoje a passagem dos 25 anos de sua morte. A Casa do Estudante do Brasil tentou preparar, como o fez há cinco anos, um ciclo do conferências sobre a vida e a obra do pesquisador para esta semana, mas como não recebeu o necessário apoio dos órgãos governamentais a idéia foi adiada. [...] Assim, tudo indica que o trabalho desse incansável estudioso do gênero humano levará ainda algum tempo para sair dos desconhecimento... (Ajuz 42).

[Today, no festivities will mark the 25th anniversary of his death. The Brazilian Student House tried to organize (as it did five years ago) a series of conferences on the life and work of the researcher for this week, but since we received no assistance from the government, the idea was abandoned. [...] As such, everything indicates that the work of this tireless student of the human condition will take some more time to come out of the unknown.]
In a period where Brazilians were choosing to be one people, espousing and advancing the notion of a “racial democracy” as a universalist tenet and a cornerstone of racial identity, Ramos’s premise of marginality, of racial diversity, of psychic malaise represented a side of Brazil that the ideologues did not want to acknowledge. It was certainly more expedient to embrace the vision of Gilberto Freyre, who in Casa Grande e Senzala presented a harmonious coexistence between masters and slaves, insisting that the type of racial segregation and strife found in the U.S. did not to exist in Brazil because of the rather conciliatory nature of the Portuguese (read Latin) temperament, which differed significantly from that of the Anglo-Saxon northerners. It was not until the 1970’s that Freyre’s articulation of a “racial democracy” was debunked by U.S. scholars.9

Ramos, although a member of the circle of intellectuals disseminating ideas and theories of culture, is a destabilizing figure in the Brazil of the 1930’s, particularly after the Vargas prise de pouvoir in 1937 and his vision of the Estado Novo (New State). Ramos, along with fellow ethnographer Edison Carneiro and novelist Jorge Amado, was part of a group called the “Academia dos Rebeldes,” a fact pointing to his tendency toward unorthodoxy (Amado 1964, 30). The following quote from Ramos shows how

9 In a very interesting letter to a colleague in 1941, Brazilian scholar and author Mário de Andrade shows that Freyre’s position was not wholly accepted as accurate in that nation at the time of the sociologist’s writings. I will return to this point in the subsequent chapter, “Beyond Description: The Ethnographic Impulse in the Fiction of Mário de Andrade and René Depestre.” Suffice it to say for the moment that Andrade accuses Freyre of a certain intellectual dishonesty with regard to Brazilian society. This is not to say that Freyre was universally detracted in Brazil; quite the contrary, he was well respected and recognized as a great sociologist by his compatriots. The surprising aspect is that Mário de Andrade’s criticism of Freyre’s take on race in Brazil comes as early as 1941. In a provocative article that details the development of Freyre’s articulation of patriarchal culture and “harmonious” racial miscegenation in Brazil, Jeffrey Needell argues that Freyre’s work, despite his personal abhorrence for Modernism, “facilitated modernization by the elites through legitimizing them and providing the hegemonic possibility of the myth of racial democracy, with its obfuscation of historical conflict.” As a mulatto, the very “evidence” (according to Freyre) of Brazil’s unproblematic racial coexistence, Andrade was able to discern the flaws in the sociologist’s position. See also Historian G. Reid Andrew’s work on Brazilian race relations and Freyre.
distant his views were from those of several of his colleagues, regarding the status of race relations in Brazil: “Basta relembrar o incrível fato da destruição, determinada pelo Ministério da Fazenda, em circular n. 29, de 13 de Maio de 1891. O treze de Maio, que foi a data oficial da libertação dos negros escravos, aí marcou a data de seu desconhecimento... [It is enough to remember the incredible fact of the destruction ordered by the Ministry of Plantations, in Article no. 29, on the 13\textsuperscript{th} of May 1891. The 13\textsuperscript{th} of May, which was the official date of the emancipation of the black slaves, also marked the date they became unknown] (Ramos 1935, 5).\footnote{Melville Herskovits. (Apr., 1951,140) “In Brazil, where it was felt that the destruction of documents bearing on slavery and slaving operations at the time of emancipation had irrevocably weakened historical research in this area, evidence is accumulating to show that by no means all documents were burned, especially those in the archives of local bureaus not primarily concerned with slavery.”} Abídas do Nascimento attributes an equally forceful denunciation of the official program of Brazilian race relations and history to Ramos’s colleague: “the ethnographer Edison Carneiro, a mulatto from Bahia...declares: ‘the work of that which we call “civilization in Brazil” has been precisely this destruction of Black and Indian cultures...’ (80 Anos de Abolição) (Do Nascimento 1978, 416).

Although Ramos and Price-Mars presented renegade viewpoints, their work is symptomatic of a larger interest in things African in the early part of the twentieth century. This is the era of French anthropologist Marcel Griaule’s Paris-Dakar mission, which brought Dogon art and culture to the museums of France, the era of the Harlem Renaissance, the period in which Martinique’s Aimé Césaire wrote Cahiers d’un retours au pays natal, when Frenchman Alfred Métraux wrote his ethnographic monograph Le Vaudou en Haïti. It was a period of intense reflection on Africa. In the Americas, a self-reflexive mood took hold as social scientists began to assess the cultural transformations
occurring in their communities. Anthropologists were few in number, leading to a circulation of ideas among the scholars practicing in the field. The ethnographic monograph had a limited, erudite readership, leaving the travelogue as the primary delivery method of information on other cultures to the general readership.

The popularity of such works, which parallels the growing interest in anthropology, leads to a glut of exotic accounts, including that of William Seabrook, a Marine brought to Haiti by the American Occupation. Price-Mars considers the Magic Island, for example, the latest in a long tradition of slanderous efforts of which the Haitian population had had enough. According to the Haitian ethnographer, the awakening of a Haitian consciousness rising up against the calumnies launched at indigenous culture begins in the late 19th century: « Mais, à partir de 1885, il y eut comme une révolte de la sensibilité haïtienne contre les erreurs, les injures, les outrages d’une catégorie de publicistes exotiques — voyageurs, journalistes, diplomates — en quête de reportages sensationnels qui trouvaient dans la matière haïtienne des occasions de persiflages, de dérisions, de railleries… » [But beginning in 1885, there was a near revolt in Haitian sensibilities against the errors, the insults, the offenses of a group of exoticist publicists — travelers, journalists, diplomats — in search of sensationalist reports, who found in Haitian matters opportunities for mockery, derision, disparagement] (Price-Mars 1954, 17). Seabrook becomes emblematic of a crass opportunism:

*Depuis que Seabrook en a tiré une fortune avec « Magic Island », d’anciens soldats ou officiers de l’Occupation Américaine de notre pays, assoiffés d’argent et de notoriété comme Virkus « LE ROI BLANC DE LA GONAVE », le Capitaine Craig dans « CANNIBAL’S COUSINS », ou de simples imposteurs sans talents comme Loederer dans*
“VOODOO FIRE IN HAITI” ont apporté au monde le scandale d’une exploitation mercantile dont nos mœurs populaires ont fait tous les frais en y accrochant les plus extravagantes et les plus grotesques inepties [original emphasis] (Price-Mars 1954, 26).

[Ever since Seabrook made a fortune with Magic Island, former soldiers or officers of the American Occupation of our country, money hungry and thirsting for notoriety, like Virkus, The White King of La Gonâve, Captain Craig in Cannibal’s Cousins, or simple, no-talent imposters like Loederer in Voodoo Fire in Haiti, have brought to the world the scandal of a commercial exploitation where our popular customs have borne the burden of the most extravagant and grotesque nonsense.]

Although Ramos, for his part, characterizes the contents of Magic Island as “as curiosas reportagens de Seabrook [the curious accounts of Seabrook],” it is the fact that Ramos initially appears to take the book as representative of Haitian culture which disconcerts Price-Mars most: « N’a-t-il [Ramos] pas été tenté d’accorder crédit aux séduisantes contre-vérités traduites en tant de langues par la tapageuse publicité de « Magic Island »? D’ailleurs Seabrook est si captivant? Et, c’est tout ce qu’il sait de nous » [Hasn’t he [Ramos] been tempted to give credit to the seductive untruths, translated into several languages, offered by the clamorous publicity of “Magic Island”? Besides, is Seabrook so captivating? And that is all that he knows about us] (Ramos 1979 (1937), 187; Price-Mars 1954, 44).

In an article that comparatively analyzes U.S. texts on Haiti, Alasdair Pettinger convincingly argues the ways in which race frames the discursive tone of the imagined Haiti that Seabrook, Craigie, James Weldon Johnson, Melville Herskovitz and Zora Neale Hurston depict. In Weldon’s case for example, Pettinger writes:
There are neither wild cannibals nor welcoming mothers in James Weldon Johnson’s Haiti… In contrast to Craige and Seabrook, Johnson’s Haiti is not coded as primitive but as civilized: civilized in the grand sense, a pinnacle of the truly human triumph of mind over body, culture over nature, order over chaos, whether this is represented modestly by a neat and tidy garden or extravagantly (and perhaps more aptly) by a stupendous architectural feat…. Yet again, he is not just writing about Haiti here… Society in Port-au-Prince, he says, “moved on a level that for wealth and culture could not be matched by the colored people in any city in the United States”. The rural peasant, though poor, is an independent landowner, unlike propertyless descendants of the slaves freed during the Civil War…and his hut compares favourably with the filth and squalor of the log-cabins of the South. And the citadel [La Ferrière] – well, the citadel is no doubt meant to speak for itself (Pettinger 147).

As an African-American, Johnson is not merely contesting the image of Haiti projected by Craige and Seabrook; he is also making an indictment of race relations in the United States by positing that even the Haitian peasant is faring better than rural Blacks in the South. Price-Mars, for his part, undertakes to present a factual portrayal of Haitian society to Arthur Ramos.

A more informed Ramos later alludes to the typical exploitative and distorted use of Vodu in certain travel writings: “Os viajantes e escritores exploraram com fins literários essas descrições do culto vodu, rodeando-as de relatos mais ou menos fantasiosos…” [Travelers and writers explored these descriptions of vodu with literary aims, surrounding them with more or less fantastic tales…] (Ramos 1979, 186). In another passage he goes into even more detail, taking into account the representation of Haiti in literature:

_Uma série de lendas e reportagens sensacionalistas, desde muito tempo vem explorando o tema. O Haiti seria, para a_
Seabrook’s work spurred a rash of sensationalist and fictitious “eyewitness” accounts of Vodu practices, which Price-Mars insists are wholly inaccurate and defamatory.¹¹

Ramos’s use of the word “cinematographic” is an indication of his awareness of the aspirations of these writers in maximizing entertainment value at the expense of accuracy, as well as Hollywood portrayals of the island, particularly with the figure of the zombi. Pettinger continues: “Seabrook and Craige organize their description in terms of the idealized native and the brutal savage respectively. Each claims to challenge one stereotype only to reproduce the other … [t]he two authors acknowledge the truth of both images; they disagree only on which one represents the real, essential Haiti. The category

¹¹ Seabrook, a “Lost Generation” writer, makes the following statement in the first chapter of his book: “Voodoo in Haiti is a profound and vitally alive religion—alive as Christianity was in its beginnings and in the early Middle Ages when miracles and mystical illuminations were common everyday occurrences —that Voodoo is primary and basically a form of worship, and that its magic, its sorcery, its witchcraft (I am speaking technically now), is only a secondary, collateral, sometimes sinisterly twisted by-product of Voodoo as faith, precisely as the same thing was true in Catholic mediæval Europe.” The book focuses, however, on the conceptual link to magic, pointing more to Seabrook’s own interest in the subject than to any factual evidence. Among Seabrook’s other titles is Witchcraft, Its Power in the World Today.
of ‘the primitive’ is double-sided, the product of ambivalence whose inconsistency they attempt to resolve by ignoring or belittling the significance of one aspect or the other” (Pettinger 144). It is Price-Mars’s (and subsequently Ramos’s) contention that neither man captures the “real” Haiti. The publication of Melville Herskovitz’s *Life in a Haitian Valley*, sent to Ramos by the publishing house Alfred A. Knopf with a hopeful request for a review and comments prompts Ramos to respond with a congratulatory letter to the publisher for its part in presenting the world with a legitimate, scientific work regarding Haitian life.

The proliferation of writing of the melodramatic type and the dearth of what they perceive as serious texts regarding Brazil and Haiti propels the two men (with no small measure of indignation), toward the articulation of an autoethnography, a cultural exploration from “within” rather than from “without.” Ramos himself provides the justification for the move toward autoethnography: “Com relação aos estudiosos estrangeiros, sabemos quantos dados erróneos, quanto preconceito má fé [With regards to the studies of foreigners, we know the number of erroneous facts, the amount of prejudice and bad faith!] (Ramos 1954). As members of the larger culture of the societies they discuss, their efforts represent an attempt at countering the essentializing discourses that traditionally viewed Latin American cultures as degraded in direct proportion to each nation’s degree of “African-ness” and race-mixing.

Anthropologist George Marcus distinguishes between the travelogue and the ethnographic monograph in the following way:

One of the primary differences between the travel account and realist ethnography is the marked absence in the latter of the narrator as a first-person presence in the text and the dominance instead of the scientific (invisible or
omniscient) narrator who is manifest only as a dispassionate, camera-like observer; the collective and authoritative third person (“the X do this”) replaces the more fallible first person (“I saw the X do this”). The resulting effect, of course, is a paradoxical one (Marcus & Cushman 1982).

The position of the autoethnographer problematizes the strict dichotomy fulfilling the function of the witness, the informant and the “authoritative third person”, revising the observer-based formulas “the X do this”, “I saw the X do this”, with a new perspective: “I know the X do this because…” This offers a paradox of its own, since the one figure represents a narrator who is more authoritative than the travel writer yet not as dispassionate as the “camera-like observer.” The autoethnographer represents a hybrid, and in the case of Price-Mars and Ramos, a replication of the fused social elements that make up the creole cultures that the two men study.

In Colonial Desire: Hybridity in Theory, Culture and Race, Robert Young discusses nineteenth century theories of race, and cites as one example Robert Knox, author of The Races of Man: “the hybrid was a degradation of humanity and was rejected by nature (Young 1995, 19).” The dominant preoccupation of anthropological study in nineteenth-century Europe was race, and by mid-century, what was touted as “the new ethnology, the science of races, was usually polygenist, and thus not only described physical and linguistic differences between different races, but investigated their intellectual and cultural differences so as to provide the political principles of social and national life. It was, in short, a practice of cultural politics” (Young 66). This type of racialist thinking persisted well into the twentieth century, and is what Price-Mars confronts while at university in Paris. A discussion about the supposed degeneration of
“Saint-Domingue” after the Haitian Revolution (1791-1804) sets him thinking about the inaccurate perceptions of his culture.

Heavily influenced by the premises of Psychoanalysis, and spurred on by a similar need to refute persistent and pervasive, post-Enlightenment assumptions regarding African-American cultures (I use the term here in its most inclusive application as defining peoples of African ascendance in all of the Americas), combined with a mission to denounce the spurious works of the type of Seabrook, both Price-Mars and Ramos delved into a project of identifying the different manifestations of trace elements from various African cultures, particularly through the apparatuses of folklore and oral history. Each man makes a distinction between folklore as a subcategory of the science of Ethnology (viewed as a legitimate area of inquiry), and folklore simply as picturesque artifact. As Ramos explains in *O folk-lore Negro do Brasil*:

> Neste livro, o “folclore [sic] negro” do Brasil não é estudado como material pitoresco, para recreio de espíritos curiosos. Não se trata de uma história amena de curiosidades domésticas e sociais da vida do negro nas plantações, nos engenhos, nas minas, nos trabalhos da cidade. É um método de exploração científica do seu inconsciente coletivo, como fizemos no estudo das suas religiões e dos seus cultos. Apenas agora trabalhamos com material diferente, embora aproximados um do outro. Religiões, cultos, folclore… “estradas régias” que levam ao inconsciente coletiva (Ramos 1954 (1935), 9).

[In this book, the “negro folklore” of Brazil is not studied as an offering of picturesque entertainment for the curious. It is not a work full of domestic and social oddities regarding the lives of blacks on the plantations, in the mills, in the mines, in city jobs. It is a method of scientific exploration of their collective unconscious, like we apply in studies of their religions and of their cults. Only now, we work with different materials, although they are similar with one another. Religions, cults, folklore… “roadway tolls” that lead to the collective unconscious...]
This shift in the perception of folklore is significant in the way that it allows for the reconceptualization of folklore from a descriptive element into a means of engaging in a discourse on culture. The cultural markers are not aberrant, but rather facets of historical consequence.

In “Formation ethnique, folk-lore et culture du peuple Haïtien” Price-Mars insists that in the stead of archival references, and lacking a written form, the oral folktales of the Haitian people constitute the documentation of ages past. They await their “interprètes avertis” [informed interpreters]. Indeed, Price-Mars and Ramos look upon their roles as facilitators of cultural understanding seeking to minimize the errors of “translation” that befall those who look at cultures from the outside. They exemplify what “ethnographic modernity” — as Clifford defined the term — represents: “the state of being in culture and looking at culture” at the same time.

In the essay “Le Cycle du nègre: essays [sic] de géographie humaine,” Price-Mars indicates an important attribute that he sees in the work of his Brazilian counterpart: «Arthur Ramos.... a posé les données du problème non point en terme de races inférieures ou supérieures mais en terme de culture » [Arthur Ramos.... conceives of the problem not in terms of inferior or superior races, but in terms of culture…(emphasis added)] (Price-Mars 1954). Their focus on folklore reveals the importance that they attach to this type of cultural production and its impact on national identity.12

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12 It is interesting to note the unstable spelling of the word “folklore” at the time; in Price-Mars we find both “folklore” and “folk-lore” and in Ramos’ work, the orthography shifts from the two preceding spellings to a third: “folclore”, highlighting the evolutionary status of the research at the time.
By August of 1936, Price-Mars refers to Ramos as his “eminent confrère” and writes of the establishment of an exchange of ideas: “Je suis enchanté de cultiver les rapports établis entre nous et rien ne me paraît plus agréable que des échanges de vue entre gens qui sont unis par leur ‘common ideal’ de recherches scientifiques et de fraternité humaine” [I am happy to cultivate the relationship established between us, and nothing seems more agreeable to me than the exchange of points of view between people united by their common ideal of scientific research and the brotherhood of man] (Price-Mars, August 1936).

Price-Mars is so impressed with *O Folklore Negro do Brasil* that he informs Ramos of his intention to “consacrer une étude prochaine à l’oeuvre si méritoire et instructive des savants brésiliens et particulièrement à cette équipe de chercheurs qui s’attachent à fixer les données du problème socio-anthropologique du nègre Brésilien, mon frère lointain en souffrances et en espérance” [Dedicate a future study to the meritorious and instructive works of Brazilian intellectuals and particularly to the team of researchers who seek to situate the facts of the socio-anthropological question of the black Brazilian, my distant brother in suffering and in hope] (Price-Mars August 1936).

In later works Price-Mars cites researchers Edison Carneiro and Gilberto Freyre. In a letter dated July 22, 1937, Ramos thanks his “eminente amigo” for the receipt of a series of articles written by Price-Mars’s son, Louis on “La Psychiatrie et la mentalité haïtienne,” as well as the elder Price-Mars’s “Le cycle du nègre” and Dorsainvil’s *Névrose et Vodou*. Ramos credits his reading of these works, along with the bibliographic references they contain, with causing him to re-evaluate some of his earlier works. He confesses that at the time that he wrote *O Negro Brasileiro* and *O Folk-Lore*
Negro do Brasil, he knew nothing of the contributions of Haitian scholars regarding “os
problemas do Negro” (Ramos July 1937).

Thanks to Price-Mars’ “interference” as he puts it, he will rethink the problematic, and include in his next book As Culturas Negras no Novo Mundo, an entire chapter dedicated to Haitian folklore, utilizing Price-Mars’ research, as well as that of other scholars such as Dorsainvil and Melville Herskovits (the famed American anthropologist with whom Ramos developed a close friendship). As the title suggests, the book is a comprehensive study of black cultures throughout the Americas. The content of the letter shows the value that the researchers placed on the scholarly work of their peers. The index of Arthur Ramos’ correspondence at the Biblioteca Nacional in Rio de Janeiro includes letters from such luminaries as Claude Lévi-Strauss, Sigmund Freud, Melville Herskovitz, W. E. B. DuBois.

Ramos indicates in an article, “The Negro in Brazil,” that his ethnographic project is one of recuperation: “In the attempt to reconstruct the African Negro culture in Brazil there should be no parti-pris (bias). [The] cultural survivals do not exist pure and unmixed, and are not easily perceived” (Ramos 1941, 515-523). In order to separate the elements of the mixture into their undiluted cultural forms (Indigenous, African, European), it becomes evident that the work must be comparative in nature. There is, therefore, a distinction made between an anthropological study of Brazil which takes into account all of the different domestic ethnicities, and his larger Pan-Africanist project which focuses on the specificity of the contributions of various African elements.

In the latter case, for both Ramos and Price-Mars, the feeling is that conclusions are possible only by identifying commonalities with other countries where such a
comparable mixture exists. This thought underscores the Pan-Africanist ethnographic enquiries of the two medical doctors. It is evident in their relentless quest to participate in various endeavors that will bring them into contact with other researchers in the fields of anthropology, sociology and history. In identifying those tendencies that are largely pan-American, Ramos and Price-Mars feel better informed to present a case for those elements that are particular to their own societies, thus paving the way for defining national culture. When comparing the difference between Macumba and Vodu, Ramos informs us that the absence of the figure of the zombi in the former is due to the make up of Brazil’s slave population, which did not include Dahomean Africans. Possession cults are primarily associated with Dahomey.¹³

Ramos (like Price-Mars), sees himself as a crusader, insisting that Brazil acknowledge the contributions of its black population to the national culture; the conspiracy of silence (the words are his) must end:

*Quando a atenção dos estudiosos brasileiros ainda não se achava, como hoje, voltada para os assumptos de ethnographia e sociologia negro-brasileiras, eu levantava, na Bahia, o brado de alarme contra a conspiração do silêncio, que devia cessar* (Ramos, 1937, ii).

[When the attention of Brazilian researchers had not believed itself contorted by the assumptions of the ethnography and sociology of afro-Brazilians (and still does not today), I sounded, the alarm bell in Bahia against the conspiracy of silence, which should stop.]

¹³ Ramos, *O Folclore Negro*. [The zombi is one example of a cultural symbol found in the work of Depestre which the writer imbues with a different connotation; it is no longer a figure whose body is dispossessed of its soul but rather represents for the writer, by turns the historical condition of the plantation slave and the “modern” mystified believer of noiriste doctrine. An in depth discussion of this type of shift in the use of cultural and identitary symbols ensues in the chapter on Depestre and Andrade.]
Ramos insists that this silence is hypocritical, since the reasons given for the absence of a discourse regarding the African aspects of Brazilian culture is that this silence facilitates the inclusion (be it marginal) of blacks into the larger sphere of culture (read as European), and explains away the exclusion (of African elements) as being for the greater good:

*Psicologicamente, o 13 de Maio de 1891 exprime o “não-querer” ver o assunto, a cegueira “scotomizante” para uma tarefa incômoda. Mas “incômoda” para os negros? Não. Incômoda para os brancos, os falsos cientistas que quiseram apagar no papel as “manchas” negras que ainda hoje têm os seus teóricos, êsses cientistas que nos acenam uma pretensão “branqueamente” arianizante como se isto pudesse mudar a face dos nossos destinos... (Ramos 1940, 5-6)(original emphasis)*

[Psychologically, the 13th of May 1891 expresses the unwillingness to see the problem, the “scotomizing” blindness to an inconvenient task. But inconvenient for the blacks? No. Inconvenient for the whites, the pseudo-scientists who want to blot out from the paper the black “stains” which their theories still have today, these scientists gesture toward an aryanizing aspiration of “whitening” as if this could change the face of our destinies....]

For Ramos, this stance is inaccurate and mystifying; it concerns itself with a privileging of whiteness at the expense of truth. The undercurrent in Ramos’ words is strong enough to suggest malicious intent in this project of misinformation. Positioning himself as an opponent of this demagoguery, Ramos is determined, therefore, to counter the assertions of the “falsos cientistas” by bringing us factual evidence as well as rendering transparent theoretical advances, such as providing us an explanation of the acculturative process:

*A obra do sincretismo avassalou negros, brancos e mulatos indistintamente... Poderíamos dizer que a desafricanização*
gradual do negro foi acompanhada, como contra-parte de uma deseuropeização do branco no Brasil, tudo resultando num compromisso, numa forma cultural novo, onde o negro adaptou elementos culturais europeus, e o branco aceitou elementos culturais africanos (Ramos 1940).

[The work of syncretism subjugated blacks, whites and mulattos indiscriminately...We could say that the gradual de-Africanization of blacks was accompanied by its counterpart, the de-Europeanization of whites in Brazil, all of which resulted in a compromise, a new cultural form, where blacks adapted European cultural elements, and whites accepted African cultural elements (emphasis added)].

In the passage above, within the larger context of Pan-Africanism, Ramos posits the particularity of Brazilian culture, the “new cultural form”: a hybrid. Ramos also defines and distinguishes the technical vocabulary at his disposal for his readers: “adaptation is a biological process; accommodation is a social process; adjustment is a psycho-social process; and acculturation is a cultural process” (Ramos 1941, 244-250). Realizing that the general population is not familiar, nor equipped with the tools for deciphering the ethnographic text, yet wanting to compete favorably with the erroneous information proliferating in travelogues, Ramos endeavors to empower his audience. This allows him to explore the causal relationships of such phenomena in the crucible of identity formation, while giving Brazilians social-historical evidence on the road to self-knowledge.

**Contexts: “à la française ?” or “à la mode de chez nous?”**

The foray into Ethnography for both men begins with the challenging of preconceived notions of race and the subsequent search for answers to the reasons for the
apparent lack of assimilation of the black populations into the broader culture (in Brazil), and the lack of socio-cultural cohesion (in Haiti). Despite the domestic agenda, the initial research was occurring in a context of Francophile influence and under the sway of Psychoanalytic theorizing. In Haiti, one may posit that a distinction is to be made between the elite mulatto class that emulated everything French (wealthy blacks are assimilated into this echelon), and the popular masses, which were excluded from such an overt sign of privilege. Price-Mars termed the phenomenon of looking to France for Haiti’s cultural heritage as “bovarysme collectif” a term that finds its origins in Gustave Flaubert’s ill-fated heroine Emma Bovary whose insistence on living in a dream world ultimately leads to her undoing.

For Price-Mars, the American Occupation (1915-1934) made one thing clear: the “bovarysme” of the Haitian elite had left the Republic open to invasion. The rejection of the nation’s African cultural heritage in favor of mimicry of all things French, is for him, an act of complicity in the betrayal of the Haitian people by a historically treacherous minority. By living in an “imaginary” world where all things French are venerated and the realities of Haitian society with all of its complexities are ignored, the elite encouraged the fomenting of class hatred and mutual suspicion among themselves and the masses – thus weakening the cohesion of the nation.

The metaphoric return to Africa is therefore a political as well as a socio-cultural urgency, undertaken to right the errant path of the Haitian elite and prevent the nation from losing its sense of self and sense of purpose. A direct result of Price-Mars’s chastisement of the elite, his ethnographic work and rhetorical resistance to the American

14 There is an old Haitian adage cited by Price-Mars: A wealthy black is a mulatto, a poor mulatto is a black. *Panorama du Folklore Haïtien* This proverb is attributed to General Acaau in 1843.
Occupation is the *Roman Indigéniste*, where young writers strove to look for an indigenous, “authentic” voice within Haiti which I will discuss in the following chapter. The majority of Haitians had no point of reference for distinguishing the African survivances from the creole innovations handed down to them.

Nevertheless, it must also be stated that for all of his Africanist leanings, Price-Mars himself proves somewhat ambivalent, more acutely so later in life, in his own situating of Haiti between her two dominant cultural heritages. As a member of the elite, he never fully extricates himself from the position of privilege imbued with his own predilection for French thought. In an open letter to Haitian historian and director of the École Normale Supérieure, Dr. René Piquion, author of *Manuel de la Négritude*, Price-Mars begins by congratulating the author on studying the different aspects of Negritude and its evolution since Aimé Césaire, Léon-Gontron Damas and Léopold Sedar Senghor first articulated it.

Although Price-Mars thanks Piquion for including him in his book, the Haitian ethnographer is markedly vexed that Piquion has made factual errors in certain biographical elements, deriding Piquion for having misrepresented his origins as well as his political views. Price-Mars informs the historian that his father “était l’un des fils du Baron Pierre de Mars, de la noblesse du second Empire et grand exportateur de café et de bois d’acajou…,” [was a descendent of Baron Pierre de Mars, a noble of the Second Empire and a major exporter of coffee and mahagony], thereby establishing his own status as a member of elite, while rebuffing Piquion’s careless methodology, both as it relates to Price-Mars’s personal biography (Piquion informs his readers that the ethnographer’s maternal grandmother is named Plandestine Goda, when it is actually
Marie Elizabeth Godard, a prominent family name in Haiti (Plandestine is a nickname)), but also in Haitian history. Price-Mars corrects many of the errors he perceives in Piquion’s tome, providing sources, something he chides Piquion for not doing thoroughly (Price-Mars 1967).

In a speech given in the presence of a French Delegation that visited Haiti shortly after the former colony’s celebration of 150 years of independence from France, Price-Mars insists on the continuity of French heritage in Haiti. The speech is curious, as it comes some twenty years after Price-Mars’s “Africanist” period and seems to conflict with some of the earlier positions that the ethnographer espoused. This apparent contradiction is a focal point of René Depestre’s critique of Price-Mars’s œuvre, which I address in the chapter on Depestre and Andrade. Literary critic Maximilien La Roche observes:

[Price-Mars] ne va pas jusqu’à réclamer une indépendance radicale de la culture haïtienne par rapport à celle de la France. Au contraire, convaincu que « nous sommes…de ce côté-ci de l’Atlantique, les héritiers des traditions et de la civilisation d’un grand pays et d’un grand peuple… (et par conséquent) redevables envers la France et envers le monde de notre gestion de ce patrimoine spirituel » il ne cessera de protester de sa fidélité à l’égard de la langue française et se récriera à l’idée qu’on puisse croire qu’il envisage de voir l’haïtien se substituer au français (La Roche 1981).

[[Price-Mars] does not go as far as to demand a radical break between Haitian culture and that of France. On the contrary, convinced that ‘we are...on this side of the Atlantic, the inheritors of the traditions and the civilization of a great country and a great people... (and consequently) indebted to France and to the world in our management of this spiritual heritage’, he never ceases to proclaim his faithfulness to the French language and decry the idea that
we can believe he contemplates the substitution of Haitian for French.]

Price-Mars, as an intellectual in a country with one of the highest illiteracy rates in the Americas, is never fully able to extricate himself from his position of duality. In response to some of his critics, Price-Mars denies that he ever advocated the physical repatriation to Africa as did Marcus Garvey. As an autoethnograher, Price-Mars exhibits the multiple perspectives of one who is able to see from various vantage points. As Crary states: “Though obviously one who sees, an observer is…one who sees within a prescribed set of possibilities, one who is embedded in a system of conventions and limitations. And by ‘conventions’ I mean to suggest far more than representational practices” (Crary 1991, 6).

It is clear that Price-Mars is “embedded” in the system of Western ethnographic practices but also challenges them because he grasps the limitations from within, not because he perceives himself as being outside of those practices per se. In other words, it is not because he feels that Western ethnography is “foreign” to him that he is able to critique it. It is because his multiple perspectives provide an opening in a discipline still in its formative stages that the polymath is able to speak as both an insider and an outsider, synthesizing the disparate elements of his own culture and his personal experiences. The challenge of this multiple vantage point is that it lends itself to contradictory stances due to shifting perspectives. “Walter Mignolo has used the conceptual pair ‘allocation/relocation’ to point out that ‘identities are dialogically constructed within a structure of power. Hegemony and subalternity are two major players in this scenario: hegemony with the power of allocation meaning, subalternity as a relentless place of contestation and reallocation of meaning’” (Moreiras 1999, 377).
This rubric certainly applies to Price-Mars, who conforms to yet problematizes the categories simultaneously, who engages in a counter-hegemonic discourse while utilizing autoethnography to allocate meaning, and who in the global sphere is in the position of the subaltern, but within the confines of his nation as a member of the intellectual elite, speaks from a position of power.

Clearly hegemony was at play in the influence of France on Brazil as well, particularly as the symbol of everything Modern. The French ideal manifested itself in a multitude of ways, certainly in the literature, but even down to urban planning:

[T]he identification of Parisian culture as the definitive statement of modern civilization led to the desire to make over the pátria, especially in its urban symbol, the capital, à la française...The Brazilian elite collapsed “modernity” and France together, as we have seen, and embraced both, sometimes at the expense of Brazil, which was neither “modern” nor “French” enough to claim their devotion or, at times, even their notice...By 1900 the tyranny of the City of Light was complete (Needell 1983, 84, 97).

The crucible of national culture in Brazil cannot be readily divorced from the influence of French thought. The formation of the nation’s intellectual class reflects an emphasis on French sensibilities. It is through this initial lens that subsequent efforts are processed:

Les Brésiliens tout en prétendant avoir une culture de synthèse (fruit de superposition de la culture portugaise sur celle des Indiens et sur celle des Noirs), utiliseront le mot « assimilation » pour exprimer le processus par lequel doivent passer les immigrants afin de devenir tout à fait brésiliens. Mais ils se trouvent consommateurs de la production européenne à un degré tel que, depuis les idées de Paris jusqu’au manche à balai, en passant par le goût esthétique...tout le bien-être (matériel et spirituel) passe par les douanes (Lourdes Teodoro 200).
[The Brazilians, while asserting to have a culture of synthesis (fruit of the superimposition of Portuguese culture on that of the Indians and on that of the Blacks), will use the word “assimilation” to express the process through which the immigrants must pass in order to become entirely Brazilian. But they find themselves consumers of European production to such a degree that from the ideas coming from Paris to the broom handle, via aesthetic taste…all the (material and spiritual) well-being comes through customs.]

The influence of France or more precisely, of Paris, on both countries during the early 20th century is immeasurable. With low levels of literacy in turn-of-the-century Brazil and Haiti, and with French literature undergoing dizzying changes, from Romanticism to Realism to Symbolism and Parnassianism to Surrealism, all impacting writers living in countries with relatively short literary traditions and limited readership, mimicry was the norm.

In her article on *Macunaima*, Maria de Freitas describes the depth to which the intellectual community looked to « *la France dont la culture exerçait, depuis un siècle déjà, des influences considérables sur le développement intellectuel et artistique du Brésil* » [France, which had already exerted considerable influence on the intellectual and artistic development of Brazil for well over a century] (De Freitas 213). Mário de Andrade, one of the vanguards of Brazilian modernism, was among this first group of intellectuals to rebel against the pervasiveness of French culture in Brazil. Freitas continues, describing the efforts of the vanguard as « *une guerre contre les autres, une guerre d’ordre culturel, déclarée par les jeunes artistes brésiliens du groupe d’avant-garde dit « modernista »… double besoin de rupture – d’une part, avec les formes traditionnelles d’expression et, d’autre part, avec le joug culturel européen* » [A war
against “them”, a war on a cultural order, declared by the young Brazilian artists of the avant-garde, called « modernist »...a dual need for rupture, on the one hand with the traditional forms of expression and on the other, with the yoke of European culture] (De Freitas 214). In a letter to Mário de Andrade, historian Paulo Duarte notes the disproportionate sway of French letters on the Brazilian intelligentsia: “a influência francêsa no Brasil, onde a imigração francêsa é diminuta e todos nós temos uma formação intelectual mais ou menos francêsa” [the influence of France on Brazil, where French immigration is minute, is nevertheless such that all of us have, more or less, a French education] (Duarte 1971, 206).

Breaking away from this influence inspires an entire generation of writers to reject this overt influence on the literatures of Brazil and of Haiti. The sense of liberation provided by the ethnographic enterprise of Price-Mars and Ramos manifested itself in the emerging styles of writing, both in theme and in content. Domestic events in the political sphere also pushed writers to question the social consequences of government policies, and an assessment of values. As we shall see in the upcoming chapters, the cultural ferment and the break with overt francophilia had lasting repercussions on the imprint of national identity.

The link between ethnography and psychoanalysis is explicit in the work of Freud, notably in Civilization and its Discontents. Furthermore, the expressly psychoanalytic aspects of early twentieth century French letters are no less tangible, particularly those of the Surrealists and Breton’s automatic writing, prevalent especially in the work of
Depestre and Andrade. In keeping with the influence of Psychoanalysis and its kinship with early ethnographic interests, the titles of the works of the period reflect this prominent focus: *O Folclore Negro do Brasil: A Demopsicologia e Psicanálise* (Ramos), *Vodu et névrose* (Dorsainvil), *Simples remarques de psychiatrie sur les crises vaudouesques* (Price-Mars), *O Problema Psicológico do Curandeirismo* (Ramos), to name a few. The affinity between psychoanalysis and ethnography had its antecedents, perhaps most famously in the efforts of Freud, with whose work both men were quite familiar. Ramos’s correspondence includes letters from the illustrious psychoanalyst.

Price-Mars himself makes the explicit connection with ethnography and psychoanalysis in a reference to Arthur Ramos: « Révéler le symbolisme et la signification de ce folklore à la lumière de la psychanalyse, déceler l’emprise que la magie exerce sur lui est une tentative aussi ingénieuse que hardie. Arthur Ramos s’y est essayé avec bonheur… » [To reveal the symbolism and the significance of this folk-lore in light of Psychoanalysis, to diminish the influence that magic has on it is an ingenious as well as bold undertaking. Arthur Ramos has attempted this undertaking with success] (Price-Mars 1954, 47). Price-Mars is repositioning the symbols of Haitian particularism by making the case that folklore is not unique to Haiti, that symbols are psychologically charged, not laden with magical powers, and points to Ramos’s work as supporting his position.

Indeed, Ramos was qualified in psychology as well as psychiatry. In the introduction to the English translation of *O Negro Brasileiro*, Richard Pattee informs us that Ramos “was responsible for the organization of clinics for maladjusted and abnormal children in the public school system of Rio de Janeiro” (Ramos 1935, xi). Ramos’s larger
field of enquiry centered on questions regarding the effects of the marginalization of Brazil’s black population and the stresses this caused among those of predominantly African descent.

The notion that there exists a troubling problem upon which one must shed light, as expressed in the words of Price-Mars who seeks out anything which may “apporter quelques lumières à la solution de ces questions troubles et incertaines,” [shed light on the solution to these unclear and dubious questions] points to the lack of understanding regarding the cultural processes taking place at the time. The “problem,” as initially understood, was seen to be the apparent inability of blacks to integrate fully into the dominant society, their persistent “otherness.” The answers provided by European ethnographers and travel writers with respect to Haiti and Brazil are found to be inadequate by the two scholars. Ranging from racialist misconceptions to paternalistic, picturesque, sometimes sensationalist descriptions typically found in exploitative travel writings or superficial anthropological observations, these works are approached by readers as providing them the authoritative voice of the well-traveled and worldly eyewitness. Scientific rigor is hardly a criterion for the casual reader in search of the exotic.

The different foci of researchers themselves made it difficult to establish uniformity in the discipline. This reality of the potential weakness in ethnographic work is highlighted by Marcel Mauss:

Les travaux ethnographiques offrent trop souvent l’aspect d’une caricature ; tel qui s’intéresse à la muséographie négligera, en effet, tout ce qui n’est pas culture matérielle ; tel autre, spécialisé dans l’étude des religions, ne verra que cultes, sanctuaires et magie ; un autre observera l’organisation sociale et ne parlera que de clans et totems ;
un autre encore ne cherchera que les phénomènes économiques (Mauss 1967, 14).

[Too often, ethnographic works take on the aspect of caricature; one whose interest is in museum studies will ignore, in effect, all that does not pertain to material culture; another who specializes in the study of religions, will see only cults, houses of worship and magic; another will observe social structures and will speak only of clans and totems; yet another will only seek out economic phenomena.]

The decompartmentalization of the disciplines creates the possibility for tunnel vision or for a skewed perspective where one is blind to that which is not of primary interest or usefulness.

Seeking to present a diachronic portrayal of the evolution of Brazilian culture with the support of documented facts is a daunting task, due in part to the destruction of archival references to slavery by governmental decree in 1891. Ramos informs us that “[s]hortly after the abolition and after the “black spot” of slavery had already been erased, the slave masters’s “assientos” (papers which permitted the owners to have slaves) were burned and the custom house archives were destroyed. (Ramos 1941). It is, in part, this act of destruction that causes Ramos to question how fully one can understand Brazilian identity; he challenges the “whitening” project or “branqueamento” of Brazil, wondering how a culture that occults part of its history can honestly define itself as a nation.15

Ramos frames the question in the following manner: By denying the history of its black population, how can Brazilians claim to have an “authentic” identity as a people?

For Ramos, this attempt at defining Brazilian culture as a unified, direct filial

15 Scholars who have worked on race relations and branqueamento include Thomas Skidmore, David Haberly and Anani Dzidzienyo.
continuation of “European” culture has, as a necessary corollary, the denial of Brazil’s African roots; the inability of blacks to assimilate, as some insist, is instead for Ramos, proof that Brazil itself is in denial of its cultural reality.

The importance of the work of these two men goes beyond their ethnographic research and therefore remains relevant to the current debates regarding representation. Their combined output impacted the emergence of national literature by pointing out specificities and unique cultural traits, even while new ones were in formation. Their interrogations of the notion of Culture, and the questioning of the apport of specific ethnic groups to the national fabric lent itself quite nicely to Modernist literary movements taking place concurrently. Their work provides insights into our current understanding of post-modern ethnography and autoethnography. These perspectives will inform my close readings of the texts in the following chapters.

The difficulties in recuperating the African past for both Price-Mars and Ramos cannot merely be attributed to temporality, or to incomplete and unavailable archival material. To what degree of certainty can creole cultural traits be distinguished from African survivances when, as Jean Casimir states:

> There are two types of “African” presence in America: one consists of fragmentary and isolated traits, and the other consists of total and integrated cultural groups... (Casimir 308). If during the colonial period, what was African survived only as a substratum, the organizational process of the “counterplantation” was essential so that Africanism could surface to a more significant level. The “counterplantation” was the maroon society of Saint-Domingue that continued in the form of a village society as of 1804. Research on Haitian maroon societies, which were the equivalent of the Cuban Palenques, the Brazilian quilombos, the Jamaican “free village”, and the “Bush societies” of Guyana, was born from a logical imperative, since, in contrast to the above-mentioned societies, no
special name was even created to refer to them (Casimir 308).

The necessity of figuratively going back to Africa in order to cull for cultural imports that the enslaved brought with them as opposed to creole metamorphosis, is, at the time, a relatively new way of approaching the question. The overlap between nationalistic discourse and utopian visions such as that of Brazilian sociologist Gilberto Freyre (who posits the notion of “racial democracy,” insisting on his nation’s color-blindness and lack of racial prejudice), is of concern to Ramos, since for the ethnographer, this view presents a potential fall into the trap of denial. Freyre’s position is one of cultural synthesis:

My point of view when interpreting the history of Brazilian man is still that of one who sees in the formation of that man not only the biological process of miscegenation, but also, and almost independently, the action, expansion, development of a social process: a synthesis of cultures. This process has had the effect, not so much of causing the disintegration or degradation of any of the cultures which have had a part in making us what we are, as of integrating all of them into a new, hybrid society and culture, many-faceted and bewilderingly rich in its heritage, its modes of developing, and its values and ways of life, whether moral, intellectual, aesthetic, or material (Freyre, 1948, 57).

The worry that such a view creates is the fear of erasure. For Ramos, this refusal to see color facilitates state-sanctioned prejudice, and prevents true self-knowledge, a view shared by afro-Brazilian activist, dramaturge and professor, Abdias do Nascimento.

The nebulous demarcation lines between the emerging social sciences is another problematic factor for Ramos, one that prompts him to state: “No domínio das ciências sociais, para só citar um exemplo, ainda não se conhece o limite preciso entre a sociologia e a psicologia social, ou entre a geografia humana, a etnologia, a ecologia e a morfologia social” [...] “A Etnografia era a disciplina que tratava dos povos
“primitivos”, “incultos”, “bárbaros”, em paralelo com os povos das sociedades
“adiantadas” ou “civilizadas”. Tudo isso era a conseqüência de preconceitos
evolucionistas, que a Antropologia (com A maiúsculo) contemporânea vem tentando
destruir. [In the domain of the social sciences, just to cite an example, even now, the
precise limit between Sociology and Social Psychology, or between Human Geography,
Ethnology, Ecology and Social Morphology are still unknown.... Ethnography was a
discipline which considered “primitive” “uncivilized”, “savages”, peoples alongside
people of “advanced” or “civilized” societies. All this was the result of evolutionary
prejudice and that contemporary Anthropology (capital A), is trying to destroy] (Ramos
1958, 13).

With the formalization of the disciplines into separate entities, some of the names
have changed; Human Geography, for example, now falls under the title of
Anthropogeography and is closely allied with Ecology. Ramos insists that auto-
ethnography is the best method for contesting nationalistic ideology, which he insists is
far from bias. It is interesting to note as well that while Freyre’s utopian vision of Brazil
was espoused and promoted to the outside world during the dictatorship of Getúlio
Vargas, Ramos’s work remains little known outside of Brazil, and indeed is only recently
being reevaluated in Brazil itself, due to the recent centennial of his birth promoted by the
Biblioteca Nacional.

The efforts of these two scholars endeavored at the very least to establish a
framework to alter our understanding of ethnography in general, and to articulate an
indigenous ethnography in particular. Their work is also a call to arms to combat
misinformation and exploitation, a search for the root causes of social and cultural
degradation and an insistence on the self-definition of national culture that embraces all rather than seeking to occlude certain identitary elements. Furthermore, the link that Ramos makes between cinematography, literature and cultural representation is of particular interest to this dissertation. If, as Said posits, “the history of all cultures is the history of cultural borrowings...[c]ulture is never just a matter of ownership, of borrowing and lending with absolute debtors and creditors, but rather of appropriations, common experiences, and interdependencies of all kinds among different cultures…” then Price-Mars’s and Ramos’s contribution to comparative studies can never cease to be relevant (Said 1993, 217).

The international perspective that they bring to domestic issues of cultural relevance allowed artists to take up the challenge of finding new ways to present old, but never static, structures: folklore, myth, linguistic evolution, historical relevance, sociological realities….This call to action was heeded by writers in both nations, leading at times to startling innovations and daring configurations which I will explore in the following chapters.
Chapter II: Soul-Searching in the Backlands: the Construction of Two (Literary) Revolutions

Twentieth century political upheaval marks the history of Haiti and Brazil. While Haitians bridled under the first American Occupation from 1915 to 1934, Brazil underwent a period of political and military uprisings beginning in 1922 and continuing until Getulio Vargas’s consolidation of power in the 1930s. This period of revolutionary fervor coincides with the ferment in the social sciences that challenged a generation of writers in Brazil and in Haiti to seek what they felt were more representative models worthy of literary attention and symbolic of national culture. The desire for revolt existed in every domain, spurred on by sociopolitical anxieties.

A growing dissatisfaction with the dominance of French arts and letters over domestic thought and artistic production led to revolutionary articulations across the emerging disciplines. Anthropology, ethnology and sociology, at the forefront of this new imperative, inspired a number of publications in these fields. The phenomenon brought about the creation of several journals and new institutions dedicated to the social sciences in Haiti and Brazil, attesting to the growing importance of a domestic patrimony waiting to be enshrined: the *Departamento Municipal de Cultura* (Brazil 1934 – with Mário de Andrade as the first director) and the *Bureau d’Ethnologie de la République d’Haïti* (1941, under the direction of Jacques Roumain) along with the corresponding *Institut d’Ethnologie de Port-au-Prince* (co-founded with Price-Mars who served as chair of
Africology and Sociology while Roumain taught Pre-Columbian Archaeology and Anthropology), are three of the increasing number of institutions that represent a direct link between ethnographic study and literature.\footnote{Robert Cornevin « L’Oncle n’est plus : Jean Price-Mars (1876-1969) Champion de la Négritude » France-Eurafrique Vol. 21, #205, 1969 : 3-7 [5] ; René Depestre « Parler de Jacques Roumain » Jacques Roumain : Oeuvres complètes ; Notice biographique Gouverneurs de la roses 1999 [1944] ; Richard M. Morse “São Paulo Since Independence: A Cultural Interpretation” The Hispanic American Historical Review Vol. 34, No. 4 (Nov., 1954) 419-444 [439].} The increased interest in ethnological research and the “liberation” of literature from 19\textsuperscript{th}-Century conventions fueled polemical debates: on the implications of embracing modernism in Brazil, particularly after the scandalized responses to the theatrical offerings associated with the Semana and in Haiti, on the path that Indigénisme as an ideology as well as a mode of expression should take.

While the modernist trajectory in Brazil coalesced in 1922, another current was finding its path in that nation as well.\footnote{Modern Art Week was sponsored by a group that began experimenting with modernist ideas a few years prior to the Semana de Arte Moderna: the Futurist artist Anita Malfatti, the poet Oswald de Andrade, the writer Monteiro Lobato, Mário de Andrade were at the forefront of the group.} The interregional circulation of intellectual material regarding culture in the Americas (as discussed in chapter one) attests to the widespread determination of creating a new way of articulating American particularities and of challenging the sway of colonial discourses viewed as antiquated, inaccurate, inherently biased, and built upon a flawed foundation of racialist theorizing. Among these widespread efforts to convey, portray, produce and reproduce a cultural norm at odds with a largely Francophile tendency, we find Brazilian Regionalism and Haitian Indigenism.\footnote{Haitian Indigénisme differs from other Latin American Indigenist movements which focus on the indigenous peoples throughout the Americas, in that it looks to Africa. Introspective questioning of the Taino culture native to Hispaniola, however, is a constant element and source of study for Haitian writers and historians, ranging from Emile Nau’s Histoires des caciques (1854), to contemporary works such as Jean Métellus’s play Anacaona (1986). Haitian Revolutionary leader Jean-Jacques Dessalines’s choice of}
The year 1928 is significant for the literary output and development of autoethnographic research in the two countries, a pivotal culmination of efforts fomenting for several years and coming to maturity in cohesive and innovative modes of expression on the part of writers, social scientists and artists; just as the Modernists had their corrolary in the visual and musical arts, so too did the Indigénistes. Clearly influenced by a range of academic, prosaic and poetic works, it is less coincidental than might first appear that three of the most lauded works in each country made their appearance in that pivotal year and that all three were preoccupied with ethnographic signification. The seminal importance of Mário de Andrade’s modernist work *Macunaima: o herói sem nenhum caráter* (which showed that a stylistic break with the Brazilian canon, so heavily influenced by French literary movements, was a desirable, even worthy endeavor) and of Jean Price-Mars’s *Ainsi Parla l’Oncle* (which reoriented the focus of writers on a new set of potential symbols to be appropriated in the name of cultural identity), cannot be overstated.

The year 1928 also brought the publication of José Américo de Almeida’s _A Bagaceira_ [translated with the title Trash], “officially” ushering in the Regionalist literary movement centered in northeastern Brazil (the tenets of regionalism had been circulating a few years prior to the publication of Almeida’s book). Clearly then, 1928 represents a

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“Haïti” (the land of high mountains in Marcorix – the Taino/Arawak language) as the name of the new republic is an acknowledgment of this spectral indigenous presence. An example of this aspect of Haitian Indigenism that is contemporary with the Indigénistes is the work of Frédéric Burr-Reynaud, particularly his play *Anacaona* and *Poèmes Quisqueyennes*. The subjects are historical figures, the Indigenous court of Hispaniola and the Spanish conquistadors of the fifteenth century, but the form of Burr-Reynaud’s work adheres to French styles of versification.

19 The translation “trash” fails to capture the breadth of meaning associated with the Brazilian title. The glossário at the back of Almeida’s book provides a fuller definition: “Bagaceiro: pátio das fazendas onde são depositados os detritos da cana moída; por extensão: o ambiente moral dos engenhos. São expressões pejorativas: moleque de bagaceira, criado na bagaceira, etc.” (Bagaceiro: a fazenda (ranch) patio where...
defining moment in the intersection between literature and the social sciences, particularly and most explicitly with ethnography, a pivotal juncture with new points of reference. Almeida puts it succinctly with respect to Brazil: “Desencadeastes, em 1928, uma onda de reação contra a revolução de 1922. Mas uma reação – entendamo-nos – que por sua vez se ia converter em uma ação revolucionária do futuro” [1928 touched off a wave of reaction against the revolution of 1922. But a reaction – let us understand each other – that for its time would convert itself into future revolutionary action] (De Almeida 1974 (1928), 159).

The Brazilian author’s works focus on the common folk, presenting them in unromanticized fashion and with an ear for the language of the unschooled nordestinos who work on the sugarcane plantations. The annotated edition employs an element that is one of the more prevalent sign-posts of the Regionalist novel (both in Brazil and in the Haitian Roman Indigéniste): the glossary of terms, an element at times included by the author, other times by the editor, but clearly meant to bridge the gap of understanding between regional vernacular and what is considered standard language. It also exhibits the optimism of Positivist ideals and calls for changes to the peasant condition.

Brazilian Regionalism was a conscious effort to articulate an image of Brazil that did not limit itself to the urban centers of the south, São Paulo and Rio de Janeiro, seen as overly infiltrated by foreign influence and tastes to be the site of veracious Brazilianness. Novelist Jorge Amado refers to this phenomenon as the “colonization: of the North by the South” (Amado 1990, 53). It was, in effect, a response to modernist cosmopolitanism and
its destructive impulse, though not an outright rejection of modernism, which according to Amado was viewed by the northerners of the time as a regionalist tendency limited to the south: «Nous n’avions rien à voir avec le modernisme, notre generation n’a pas subi la moindre influence du modernisme – un movement regional de São Paulo qui eut une petite influence à Rio et presque aucune dans le reste du pays… » [We had nothing to do with modernism. Our generation was not at all influenced by modernism – a regional movement based in São Paulo which had limited influence in Rio and hardly any in the rest of the country…] (Amado Conversations 37).

The renowned sociologist, Gilberto Freyre published a Manifesto do Regionalismo in 1926, in which he declares that although one may determine two divergent groups (he refers to them as “Modernista” and “Regionalista-Tradicionalista-Modernista”), they are not mutually exclusive, that is to say, for example, that traditional elements may enter into a “Modernista” writer’s work and vice versa. Freyre views modernism as tending toward a destabilizing abstraction while depicting Regionalism as a force of action with a reach beyond intellectuals and artists. Of course, one may make the opposing claim, as modernism’s vast and lengthy influence is indisputable. Oswald de

André Ntonfo also describes the extensive reach of indigénisme in Haitian life: « En effet, aussi bien la peinture que la sculpture et surtout la musique devaient connaître un remove retentissant, traversées par le souffle de l’Afrique, lequel n’épargnait ni la religion, ni la médecine, ni même les habitudes quotidiennes de pensée. » [In effect, painting as well as sculpture and especially music would know a resounding remove, crossed by the breath of Africa, which spared neither religion, nor medicine, nor even quotidian mores.

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20 Gilberto Freyre Manifesto Regionalista 4.a Edição Instituto Joaquim Nabuco de Pesquisas Sociais MEC Recife 1967 Prefácio do autor à 4.a Edição XVII “[O] Regionalismo…se prologando até hoje como força, nos últimos anos, já oblíqua, de atuação não só sobre intelectuais e artistas como sobre homens de governo, homens de ação, líderes religiosos, reorganizadores do sistema federal de ensino no Brasil.”

[Regionalism...has extended itself up until this day as a force of action, in these last years, obliquely, not only over intellectuals and artists but also over men in government, men of action, religious leaders, reorganizers of the federal system of education in Brazil.]
Andrade’s modernist text “Manifesto Antropófago,” which rearticulated Brazil’s anthropophagous past as cultural birthright, recoded it as the highest form of artistic flattery. Oswald de Andrade published his *Manifesto da Poesia Pau-Brasil* (Brazilwood-Poetry Manifesto) in 1924. The competing schools of thought had thus been circulating before the definitive texts appear in 1928.

One year after the appearance of Freyre’s text, the Regionalists held their first congress. By 1928 the divergent tendencies manifested themselves in the northern city of Salvador da Bahia, where one group of young intellectuals gravitated toward the Modernists while the other, including Jorge Amado, Edison Carneiro and Arthur Ramos (three members of the Academia dos Rebeldes mentioned earlier), focused on a different representation of Brazil, a vision more in keeping with a facet of Brazil with which they were familiar and felt was a truer expression of brasilidade. Jorge Amado interprets this duality as a result of the legacies of Brazil’s two most famous literary forefathers: Machado do Assis (1839-1908) and José de Alencar (1829-1877):

*São os dois caminhos do nosso romance, nascendo um de Alencar, nascendo outro de Machado, indo um na direcção do romance popular e social, com uma problemática ligada ao País, aos seus problemas, às causas do povo, marchando o outro para o romance dito psicológico, indiferente, com uma problemática ligada à vida interior, aos sentimentos e problemas individuais, à angustia e à solidão do homem, sem, no entanto, perder seu caráter brasileiro* (Amado 1964, 40).

[These are the two roads of our novels, one born of Alencar, the other born of Machado, one going in the direction of the popular and social novel, with a theme linked to the country, its problems, the causes of the people, the other walking the path of the so-called the psychological novel, indifferent, with a theme linked to inner life, to the thoughts and problems of the individual, to]
anguish, to man’s solitude, without, in the meantime, losing its Brazilian character.]

Amado sees the Regionalist novel as a legitimate heir to the nation’s literary history, no more bastard than the Modernist novel, and no less relevant a form. To the perceived indifference of modernism, Amado places in opposition the social engagement of regionalism. In a chapter titled “The Trial” from A Bagaceira, Almeida lashes out at the apathy of his compatriots, using the voice of one of the characters, Dr. Marçau:

Counsel for the prosecution has accused the prisoner in the name of society. I accuse society in the name of the prisoner [...] Who is the more guilty – the prisoner who killed one man, or society, which has, through criminal neglect, allowed thousands to die? Before he was accused the prisoner was himself the victim of society. The droughts come at regular intervals. Everyone was able to predict when the catastrophes would occur. But the authorities did nothing to prevent them [...] The peasantry have been dispersed and families broken up… (Almeida 153).

At its core, the romance nordestino is meant to reveal the “other Brazil” to its people with the keen sense of observation familiar to ethnography, but it also seeks to combat state-sanctioned apathy. The writers of the Regionalist novel cast a critical eye toward the unique situations of the northeast: underdevelopment, the sugar or coffee plantations and accompanying industries, the different linguistic patterns, the socio-historical and cultural aspects that imbue the region with an alternative Brazilianness that they portray as unrefined, unfiltered through the sieve of an idealized image of French culture.

Freyre frames the issue of regionalism as one of valorization and preservation of Northern customs against the onslaught of Southern modernism which threatens to obliterate what he sees as the heroic struggle of the poor (albeit from his position of
privilege), who despite the adversity of the harsh landscape (Freyre favors a “romantic” notion of man against the forces of nature while largely overlooking the sociopolitical and economic causes of the poverty), are adherents to traditions and values native to the Northeast:

Procurando reabilitar valores e tradições do Nordeste repito que não julgamos estas terras, em grande parte áridas e heróicamente pobres, devastadas pelo cangaço, pela malaria e até pela fome, as Terras Santas ou a Cocagne do Brasil. Procuramos defender êsses valores e essas tradições, isto sim, do perigo de serem de todo abandonadas, tal o furor neófilo de dirigentes que, entre nós, passam por adiantados e “progressistas” pelo fato imitarem cega e desbragadamente a novidade estrangeira. A novidade estrangeira de modo geral. De modo particular...o que o Rio ou São Paulo consagram como “elegante” e como “moderno”... (Freyre 1967 (1926), 34).

[Undertaking the rehabilitation of the values and traditions of the Northeast, I repeat that we do not judge these lands, in large part arid and heroically poor, devastated by the cangaço, by malaria and even by hunger, as Holy Lands or Brazil’s Cocagne. Let us undertake to defend these values and traditions, yes this, from the danger of them being completely abandoned, so great is the neophyte furor of leaders who, between us, pass for forward-thinking and “progressive” by the fact that they blindly and blatantly imitate foreign innovations. Foreign innovations in general; in particular...what Rio or São Paulo consecrate as “elegant” and as “modern”…]

Freyre’s doubts about the modernist project are conveyed by his use of quotations around the words “progressive”, “elegant” and “modern.” Freyre highlights the subjectivity of such terms but appears blind to his own highly partial vision of Brazil’s northeast as “heroic” in its poverty and his role and that of his fellow regionalists as its “defenders.” He is taking the readers of his manifesto into his confidence: “between us” he states, as
he expounds upon his denunciation of what he sees as a dubious endeavor undertaken by the intellectuals of the south – a factitious or artificial representation of Brazil.

Here, Freyre’s antagonism for the modernist cultural project espoused by the establishment echoes that of Ramos, though for entirely different reasons. Where Ramos criticized the willful obfuscation of cultural elements based upon racialist thinking which sought to camouflage an African contribution to Brazil’s cultural heritage, Freyre’s criticism is couched in terms of an adherence to the past, a hinterland that is the site of resistance to an encroaching modernity that seeks to do away with what he perceives to be traditional values. Freyre’s views of Brazil’s development are closely tied to the plantation and to the patriarchal system that it fostered. Industrialization in the south, particularly in São Paulo, was antithetical to Freyre’s preservationist conservatism. Richard Morse cites a Brazilian critic with respect to the changes observed in the southern cities under the sway of modernism:

The critic Alceu Amoroso Lima [points] out that *modernismo* – with its “esthetics of noise, color, light, movement, raucous impression, protest, scandal, rupture with the obsolete and established” – reintegrates art into modern life. He then identifies São Paulo as the Brazilian city in which artists were most fully dominated by components of this life….Rio de Janeiro was inhibited from sudden renovation by the leisurely, self-satisfied internationalism of its elite and by the folklore “ruralism” of its common people. São Paulo had international affinities….which shared the immediacy of its trade and industry (Morse 438).

The opposition between São Paulo in the south and a northern city such as Recife or Salvador da Bahia can only be more striking when we note that even Rio de Janeiro (the Capital city at the time, situated between the two poles noted above) is described as an
almost retrograde city resistant to change and adhering to the “folklore ‘ruralism’ of its common people,” the very aspects which the regionalists looked to for inspiration. But Regionalism, for all of its depiction of local mores outside the zone of influence of the industrial capital, also sought out the universals in the portrayals of its humble characters, as Almeida points out:

_Regionalismo é o pé-do-fogo da literatura...Mas a dor é universal, porque é uma expressão de humanidade. E nossa ficção incipiente não pode competir com os temas cultivados por uma inteligência mais requintada: só interessará por suas revelações, pela originalidade de seus aspectos despercebidos_ (Almeida 1974 (1928), 2).

[Regionalism is the fireside of literature...but suffering is universal because it is a human expression. And our incipient fiction cannot compete with the cultivated themes of a more refined intelligence: it will only be of interest for its revelations, for the originality of its unperceived aspects.]

The key to Almeida’s articulation of Regionalism, the aspect that is of greatest interest to this study, is the notion of the revelatory ambitions of the regionalist writers (an aspect mirrored in the aims of the _Indigénistes_). It is a revelation framed within the context of cultural elements, of bringing the object of study to the reader with the intermediary of the observer/informant (in this case the writer, who in autoethnographic fashion functions as both) and with the aim of changing perceptions.

Observational methodology (which relies upon the on-site “witnessing” of the fieldworker and the interpretation of the native-informant), is a striking element in the writings of what critics call “the generation of 1930” in Brazil and “the Indigenist
generation” in Haiti (beginning circa 1928). Together, these writers account for one of the most fertile periods of literary output in both countries. Their collective works represent a melding of inspired observation patterned on ethnographic methodology, literary experimentation, political engagement and a sentiment of revolt. But as noted earlier, observational methodology remains highly interpretive, despite its attempted adherence to objective distance.

In his article “The Brazilian Literary Generation of 1930,” Ralph Dimmick names several writers who made their literary debuts between 1930 and 1935, a good number of them forming part of this current study: Jorge Amado, José Lins do Rego, Gilberto Freyre, Carlos Drummond de Andrade, Rachel de Queiroz, Graciliano Ramos (Dimmick 1951, 181). In Haiti Jacques Roumain, Jean-Baptiste Cinéas, Edris Saint-Amand, the Marcelin brothers, François Duvalier, Lorimer Denis, René Depestre, Jacques Stephen Alexis, Frédéric Burr-Reynaud are a few of the writers whose works are contemporaneous with those of the Brazilian Regionalists.

Like the Regionalists, the Indigénistes looked to the rural populace for an alternative model after suffering what they felt was a betrayal by their Francophile compatriots. Viatte informs us that as early as the first decade of the twentieth century, uneasiness about the mimetic aspects of Haitian literature manifested itself:

*En 1907, Duraciné Vaval renchérira: “La littérature de notre pays doit être nôtre, et non la simple copie de la littérature française. Libré à nos écrivains d’approfondir à loisir la langue française pur que nulle grâce du ‘doux parler de France’ ne leur soit étrangère ; mais c’est de nos mœurs, nos coutumes, nos traditions, dans le milieu que est...* 

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21 The journal titled *La Revue Indigène* appeared in 1927 however what is considered the first roman Indigéniste (Jacques Roumain’s *La Montagne ensorcelée*) did not appear until 1931.
le nôtre, qu’ils ont pour devoir de puiser la matière de leurs livres (Viatte 1170).

[In 1907, Duraciné Vaval elaborates: the literature of our country must be ours, and not a mere copy of French literature. Our writers are free to explore French at leisure, so that no grace of the “sweet words of France” is foreign to them; but it is their duty to search in our mores, our customs, our traditions, in our place, for the material of their books.]

It was not until the next generation of writers, heeding the admonishments of Price-Mars beginning in the early years of the Occupation, that Haitian literature changed course.

While the motivations differ from those that propelled the Brazilian Regionalists to the backlands, the end result is strikingly similar.

The relative insularity of Haiti for over 100 years ended in a violent confrontation with the United States Marines. The constant power struggles since Independence in 1804 made violence the province of Haitian politics. With World War I raging in Europe, the United States opportunistically capitalized on the mayhem that ensued after the lynching of Haitian President Vilbrun Guillaume Sam who had ordered General Charles Oscar to murder political prisoners. Outraged arsonists burned the Presidential Palace to the ground in response and upon learning that Sam had escaped seeking refuge in the French Legation, the angry mob violated the sanctity of the diplomatic mission, dragged Sam out and hacked him to death. The U. S. Marine invasion followed soon after.

For a population nursed on the history of the singularity of the Haitian struggle for freedom, where the heroes of the revolution (Toussaint, Dessalines, Pétion, Christophe) retained a mythical aura, a return to foreign rule represented a severe shock. In addition, for a society accustomed to racial organization based on a color system that recognized a
hierarchy within blackness, and with one layer of the society bred on a Francophone
cosmopolitanism and study abroad (particularly in France and in the United States), the
Jim Crow mentality of the typical Marine (who exploited gradations of light and dark),
was a psychic confrontation that engendered bitter resentment. In his article on the
Indigenist novel, Murdo J. Macleod states:

As a...defensive measure, the elite searched for ways in
which their country was different from and superior to the
North-Americans’ homeland. Again they had to retreat to
their African origins (Macleod 1962, 210).

Macleod overstates the elite affinity for “African origins;” the initial elite “retreat” was
toward an identification with France. In the hierarchy of culture, France, as far as
Haitians were concerned, held no peer, and so by extension, indeed feeling that Haiti was
France’s cultural standard-bearer in the Caribbean, and considering their level of
education, many among the elite felt themselves superior to the average Marine.
Furthermore, this was seen as a betrayal on the part of the United States, to the legacy of
fraternity during the struggles for independence among the hemispheric nations. Haiti,
priding itself on having aided Simón Bolívar during the Gran Colombia Wars of
Independence, also clung to its history of having sent a Haitian contingent to fight in the
Battle of Savannah during the War of 1812. As such, a virulent hostility took hold against
the Occupation, including guerrilla warfare on the part of the peasantry; the newly
reconstituted Cacos, as they were called, were not inclined to collaborate with the
invading forces, as were some of their elite counterparts.

Dissatisfaction with an over-identification with France, “bovarysme collectif” as
Price-Mars dubbed it, led to the turn toward Africa for some. Those who looked to Africa
would hardly characterize this aspect of Indigénisme as a retreat, though it was indeed,
paradoxically, a look inward toward an evocative rather than known image of Africa
which inspired an interest in ethnography and a search for trace remnants of African
culture at home. This confrontation with Modernity also provoked a reevaluation of
national identity and cultural understanding. The complex nature of this renewed
identification with Africa is well summed up by August Viatte:

\[
L' \text{« indigénisme » a réagi contre une absence de contact avec le réel, mais souvent, en caressant lui-même l'évocation d'une Afrique mythique, il a méconnu les réalités vivantes d'un peuple installé aux Antilles depuis deux siècles} (Viatte 1174).
\]

[Indigenism reacted against a lack of contact with the real, but often, by itself nursing the evocation of a mythical Africa, it didn’t know the striking realities of a people inhabiting the Antilles since two centuries.]

Moreover, this paradoxical search for the real within via a mythical externalization, a
look inside through the mediation of an outside entity, was not limited to a figurative
return to Africa. Like the bifurcation that occurred in Brazilian literature between
modernism and regionalism, the Indigenists followed divergent paths to cultural
exploration and literary expression. The Indigenists were not a monolithic block, but two
factions: one espousing the Surrealism of André Breton and its aims of a liberated text,
the other seeking an essentialist identification with Africa in the name of noirisme.

Certainly, Surrealism left its imprint in the works of René Depestre (whose \textit{Le Mât de cocagne} is studied in depth in the following chapter) and Jacques Stephen Alexis
(whose essay “\textit{Le réel merveilleux des Haïtiens}” [The Marvellous Realism of the
Haitians]) is illustrative of his awareness of the proliferation of \textit{lo real maravilloso} (first
articulated by Cuban writer Alejo Carpentier) taking hold of Latin America. Jean Michael
Dash makes the connection between the disciples of Breton and the artistic identity crisis happening in France at the time:

The disillusion and shock that followed 1918 in France created a profound distrust of traditional values both cultural and moral and led to a deliberate cultivation of absurdity, obscenity, madness and what was termed ‘cretinisation’. The nihilism of Dada and Surrealism left an indelible mark on those Haitians who were students at the time (Dash 1981, 68).

Dash notes that “[i]n treating peasant culture Price-Mars carefully glossed over the misery and disastrous poverty of rural communities and instead speculated about the ‘substratum psychologique d’où derive la mystique nègre’ […]the psychological substratum from which derives the black mystique] (Dash 1981, 200). Price-Mars’s project does not include overt political militancy, an aspect of his career that kept him in the good graces of the State over the years.

For the Indigenists, the Regionalists, as well as for the Modernists, however (to borrow a phrase from Judy Bieber), “the poetic and the political [are] inseparable” (Bieber 1998, 45). For those invested in observing peasant culture, ethnographic methodology provides a means of expression that expands a strictly ideological position, a way of layering meaning that has several dimensions. The peasant, in the literature of the Indigenists and Regionalists, represents a continuity which the writers feel identifies a static cultural repository. Eventually, that figure changes, as the political stakes rise when Marxism and communism capture the imagination and allegiance of many of the writers. The peasant then morphs into the proletariat and is newly represented as a potential agent of revolt.

In the initial portrayal, the peasant resembles the allegorical “Other” of ethnography who is atemporal and coded as the carrier and guardian of culture. The
authors endeavor to reveal this “Other” and in so doing, encapsulate national culture, making use of the tools of ethnographic method: observation, transcription, translation, documentation. This does not prevent them from making the case however, in almost paradoxical fashion, for a change in the material circumstances of peasant life. A study of the rural disenfranchised engages the writers in a critique, sometimes implicit, at times explicit, of the landed gentry and of the political forces that sustain them. As we shall see in the section entitled “Contesting National Identities: Disputing Signification,” this political engagement plays out in the respective societies, with the texts themselves inspiring cultural battles. The duality of the Regionalist/Indigenist enterprise echoes the inherent duality of ethnographic observational methodology as well as that of autoethnography. Clifford contends that:

“Participant-observation” serves as shorthand for a continuous tacking between the “inside” and “outside” of events: on the one hand grasping the sense of specific occurrences and gestures empathetically, on the other stepping back to situate these meanings in wider contexts….participant-observation is a paradoxical, misleading formula (Clifford 1983, 127).

The paradoxes are plentiful, a reduplication of the mechanics of “inside”/ “outside”: the peasant resides outside of the dominant culture (marginal), but is viewed as a cultural “insider” (central); the autoethnographe is both inside and outside of the culture under investigation.

writings of the literary movements. Between them, a definite pattern emerges; motifs common to both the Romance Nordestino and the Roman Indigéniste are: violence, poverty, misery, music, peasant labor, drought, fatalism, injustice, extra-textual glossaries, romantic rivalry, illiteracy, oraliture (I use the term to designate an oral corpus comprised of folk tales, oral history, verbal word games, legends, songs, etc.), an ideological subtext.

Stylistically, these texts differ in the manner in which they appropriate ethnographic discourse. From L’Héritage Sacré which goes so far as to bring us an ethnographer patterned on a U. S. scholar such as a Herskovits as well as an informant who happens to be a medical doctor, such as a Price-Mars, to Terras do Sem Fim, where Amado’s narrative style changes from an omniscient perspective to a documentary-like eyewitness account, to the intricately detailed Canapé-Vert, the works uphold James Clifford’s contention that there is no one, correct way to do ethnography; stylistically, ethnography is a dialogical method. One thing is certain: the writers are well-versed in the discipline, some having undertaken formal study (Roumain, for example, studied anthropology at the Musée de l’Homme in Paris under Paul Rivet), others having known ethnographers during their formative years (Jorge Amado’s friendship with Edison Carneiro and Arthur Ramos begins long before the writer’s first publications); still others express a peripheral interest in the field, clearly influenced by the authoritative weight attributed to Casa Grande e Senzala, Macunaima, Ainsi parla l’Oncle, along with the anthropological texts of Jacques Roumain. Amado discusses the impact of the social sciences on his generation:

[Os escritores surgidos no ano 30, quando os fundamentos do Brasil vinham de ser abalados por um]
movimento revolucionário de raízes populares...houve uma constante, nos alencarianos e nos machadianos: a preocupação pelo Brasil, seu destino, seu futuro. Permita aqui dizer uma palavra sobre esse tempo e os companheiros que o compuseram, quando a publicação de Casa Grande & Senzala foi um impacto ainda não renovado... quando surgiram os ensaístas e críticos de nossa realidade....Artur [sic] Ramos....Edison Carneiro (Amado 1964, 42).

[The writers who emerged in 1930, when the foundations of Brazil were shaken by a revolutionary grass roots movement...had a constant, we Alencar-ists, we Machado-ists: a preoccupation with Brazil, its destiny, its future. Allow me to say a word about this time and the friends that I had, when The Masters and the Slaves was published, it made an impact as of yet unduplicated... [it was] when the essayists and critics of our reality emerged... Arthur Ramos... Edison Carneiro.]

Renowned Brazilian Critic Antonio Candido contemplates the duality of Brazilian literature after the 1930s in an essay entitled “Poesia, Documento e História”:

Talvez se possa dizer que os romancistas da geração de trinta, de certo modo, inauguraram o romance brasileiro, porque tentaram resolver a grande contradição que caracteriza a nossa cultura, a saber, a oposição entre as estruturas civilizadas do litoral e as camadas humanas que povoam o interior – entendendo-se por litoral e interior menos as regiões geograficamente correspondentes do que os tipos de existência, os padrões de cultura comumente subentendidos em tais designações. Essa dualidade cultural, de que temos vivido, tende, naturalmente, a ser resolvida, e enquanto não for não poderemos falar em civilização brasileira... Pela primeira vez na literatura nacional... um movimento de integração, ao patrimônio da nossa cultura, da sensibilidade e da existência do povo, não mais tomado como objeto de contemplação estética, mas de realidade rica e viva... garantindo à literatura brasileira a sua sobrevivência como fenômeno cultural... (Amado 1961, 168-169).
[Perhaps one can say that the novelists of the generation of 1930, in a certain manner, inaugurated the Brazilian novel because they attempted to resolve the great contradiction that characterizes our culture, that is, the opposition between the civilized structures of the coast and the human strata who people the interior – understanding that the coastal and the interior are less geographical regions than modes of existences, cultural patterns commonly implied by such designations. This cultural duality that we have lived, must naturally be resolved, and whereas outside of it we cannot speak of Brazilian civilization… For the first time [in] our national literature… a movement of integration, from our cultural patrimony, to a sensibility for the existence of the people, not taken as an object of esthetic contemplation but as a rich and living reality… guaranteeing the survival of Brazilian literature as a cultural phenomenon.]

The cultural duality that Candido discusses would closely follow the split in literary frames of reference, one based upon the liberation of narrative style, the other insisting upon observation and evidence, but each claiming to capture the essence of Brazil.

The analysis of textual styles and ideological polarizations make up the bulk of the remainder of this chapter as well as part of chapter three. Following is a comparative study of the Romance Nordestino and the Roman Indigéniste. The duality Candido speaks of is also applicable to Haiti, as we have seen. What appears in a comparative look at regionalist literature in the two nations is the uncanny commonality of themes, styles, the political engagement on the part of the writers and their contentious relationship with the dominant ideology. Perhaps most striking is the temporal proximity, coming at a time when ethnography was finding a particular and unique perspective in Latin America.
Telluric Preoccupations: the Drought-Stricken Blood-Thirsty Landscape

Those nuts were enormous ones, and the trees were laden with them to their topmost boughs. Nothing of the kind had ever been seen before; for this was the best land in the world for the planting of cacao, a land fertilized with human blood.  

– Jorge Amado

Cette terre ne saurait mourir; ce magnifique champ saccagé par les mains sacrilèges, dévasté, mais en surface. Et ses profondeurs sont gonflées et riches en sang et en cadavres d’hommes noblement tombés : nos pères.

– Jacques Roumain

A radical violence permeates the Regionalist/Indigenist landscape. It is inextricably tied to the land and is one of the forces that regulate peasant existence. Blood flows freely in several of the works, and as the above citations suggest, there is a keen sense that the earth indulges its sanguine appetite with the blood of the downtrodden in order to enrich itself. The blood and the soil, that miscible mixture, are inextricably blended whether in the backlands of Brazil’s northeast interior or the backlands of Haïti’s rural mountains and valleys. This violence serves the authors’s purposes of acknowledging the painful history of the Americas. In an article on Brazilian race relations, scholar Zita Nunes recounts the significance of the notion of blood in the arid


23 Jacques Roumain “La Terre et les morts” Œuvres Complètes p. 447 [This land would not know how to die; this magnificent ground, ransacked by sacrilegious hands, devastated, but only on the surface. And its depths are rich in blood and swollen with the cadavers of nobly fallen men: our fathers.]
Northeast: “In Casa grande e senzala, Freyre writes that there existed in the Northeast a superstition that the blood of blacks (rather than the usual whale oil) mixed into the mortar would increase the strength of the foundation” (Nunes 238).

The sertanejo or the paysan are for these writers, both figuratively and literally, products of the land and as such, the Regionalists and the Indigenists invest in this character the basis for their claims of an authentic identity, inseparable from the nation: the peasant who clings to tradition is a formidable opponent to the modernist project with its hegemonic cloak. The backlands are, no matter the adversity, the peasant’s domain: the land is, after all imbued with the blood of the plain folk. Assimilation has no place here because despite his or her indigence, the peasant is tenacious, clinging to folkways, maintaining an oral history, creating a local vernacular and holding on to traditions. Resistance is the operative word: resistance to the importation of cultural ideas and ideals from Europe; resistance to Modernism; resistance to the elements; political resistance; resistance to change.

But the very conditions in which the Regionalists and Indigenists find the peasant call into question the Modernist project, which is clearly leaving a segment of the population (the majority in fact), at the margins. It is left to the writers to clamor for an end to the cycle of despair and violence. The peasant may lament his fate, but his fatalism leads him to accept it, as the following citation from Jorge Amado’s Terras do Sem Fim (translated as The Violent Land) illustrates:

[T]he song was growing in volume and in mourningfulness: “When I die, they’ll carry me in a swaying hammock.”
Many hammocks would be going along the roads now, it was a scene that would be repeated on many nights. And blood would drip from those hammocks to sprinkle the earth (Amado 1978 (1942), 244).
The hammocks belong to the cacao plantation workers. This mournful existence is all the worker knows and his elegiac song is a testament to the acceptance that his blood and toil are bound to the land.

In a study that looks at the history of the function of blood as a cultural symbol Anthropologist Michael Herzfeld states: “Blood is one of those material images whose meaning people take for granted […] blood is the single substance through which … kinship is brought into full substantial existence” (Herzfeld 1997). This notion of kinship extends to the writers’s establishing their solidarity with the characters of their fictional works, conveyed to the reader as more than mere artistic creations. The use of blood as a marker of legitimacy in the context of nationalism and cultural identity is an expedient device that the Regionalists and Indigenists utilize because of its long history as part of a discourse that binds individuals to a community and to a place. The subtext of violence that accompanies the rhetoric of blood further reinforces the insistence on rupture with outside influences and a focus on those “belonging” to the land. This conflation of blood and soil forces a concession on the part of those engaged in nationalist discourses: the native as subterfuge to the modernist enterprise.

In Jacques Roumain’s *Gouverneurs de la rosée*, confronting the effects of severe drought, one of the characters, a peasant named Bienaimé sees this as merely an extension of God’s handiwork: « *Eh bien, la terre est dans la douleur, la terre est dans...* 

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24 Herzfeld’s context is the island of Crete: “Crete is one of those southern European spaces where the language of blood infuses ideas about the self and where a well-established strain of literary traditionalism… [i]t is a place where the language of blood – “taking the blood back” (revenge), “blood doesn’t become water, and, when it does, it can’t be drunk” – gives a literal “feel” to what are in practice manipulable ascriptions of categorical blame and solidarity.”
la misère, alors, le Seigneur c’est le créateur de la douleur, c’est le créateur de la 

misère » [Well, the land is in distress, the land is miserable, so the Lord is the Creator of 
distress, He is the Creator of misery] (Roumain 1999). As such, the drought becomes 
something to which one must resign oneself, another element that helps forge the 
peasant’s crude existence, one more cross to bear. But even those who attempt to escape 
the fatalist mindset succumb to either the forces of nature or the nature of individuals.

Rachel de Queiroz’s character Maria Déa, (Lampião) whose name later changes 
to Maria Bonita reflects this dual tendency, on the one hand lamenting her husband’s lack 
of agency, but later expressing the futility of going against the State: [Maria Déa]- O piro 
de você é essa moleza, essa falta de ação. Podia ser de uma parte ou de outra, que eu 
não me importava [The worst thing about you is this softness, this absence of action. You 
could be on one side or the other I wouldn’t have cared about that] (Queiroz 1953, 9). At 
another point in the text she goes on, “Se lembre de Canudos...Se lembre de Pedra 
Bonita...Acabou morrendo tudo, o governo ganhou sempre...” [Do you remember 
Canudos? Do you remember Pedra Bonita? Everyone ended up dying; the government 
always wins] (Queiroz 1953, 33).

The good number of regionalist and indigenist titles that designate the land as an 
ever-present motif attest to the insistence on the part of writers of a domestic and

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25 Georges Boisvert in an article entitled “L’Image de l’Autre sertanejo dans la littérature brésilienne, de 
José de Alencar (1875) à Graciliano Ramos (1938)” [175] writes : « A Canudos, en plein Sertão, dans le 
Nord de l’Etat de Bahia, de pauvres gens rassemblés autour de leur guide spirituel Antônio 
Maciel...constituèrent en 1893 une communauté d’environ vingt mille âmes, policée et vivant paisiblement 
du fruit de son travail. Dans une société où la misère était regardée comme une fatalité inéluctable, la 
réussite de Canudos inquiéta : elle mettait en question l’ordre établi. » [In Canudos, in the Sertão, north in 
the state of Bahia, a group of poor people gathered around their spiritual guide Antônio Maciel...in 1893 
they made up a community of about 20,000 souls, [police] and living peacefully from the fruit of its labor. 
In a society where poverty was regarded with an ineluctable fatalism, the success of Canudos was 
worrisome: it called into question the established order.]
localized existence, of their telluric preoccupations: *Terras do Sem Fim, Cangaceiros, Cacau, Terra do Silencio, La Montagne ensorcellée, Le Drame de la terre, Gouverneurs de la rosée, Canapé-Vert.* This fixation is echoed in *A Bagaceira,* where the narrator describes a character, Lúcio (one of the many workers on a sugarcane plantation), in the following manner: “Mas, ele tinha a intuição da sensibilidade da terra” [But he has the intuitive sensitivity of the land] (De Almeida 18). This overt identification with the land means that when the land suffers, the peasant suffers. Despite their impoverished existence, (primarily in the material sense, but also, for some, in the moral and intellectual sense), many are portrayed as valiant in their futile attempts to escape natural and man-made disasters. The environmental phenomenon of a drought is a formidable adversary that threatens the day to day existence of the peasantry, but also serves to reveal who they are and how they live. The sun itself becomes a merciless, punishing entity, slowly draining the life out of an already barren land. The scorching drought wreaks havoc on the rural landscape.

The drought as leitmotif appears in Roumain’s *Gouverneurs de la rosée:*

> *Derrière la maison, la colline arrondie est semblable à une tête de nègresse aux cheveux en grains de poivre: de maigre broussailles en touffes espacées, à ras du sol, comme une sombre épaule contre le ciel, un autre morne se dresse parcouru de ravinements étincelants, les erosions ont mis à nu de longues coulées de roches, elles ont saigné la terre jusqu’à l’os. Pour sûr qu’ils avaient eu tort de déboiser* 

Roumain 1999, 11).

[Behind the house, the rounded hill resembles the head of a black woman with hair like peppercorns: some meager

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26 [The titles listed above in English are (most available in translation): The Violent Land, Cacao, Land of Silence, The Enchanted Mountain, The Drama of the Land, Masters of the Dew. Canapé-Vert is the name of what was then an area on the outskirts of the capital city of Haiti, Port-au-Prince.]
brush in sparse tufts, covering the ground, like a somber shadow against the sky, another mount straightens itself traversed by sparking eroded gullies, the erosion has exposed long rock flows, they have *bled* the earth to the bone. For certain they were wrong to have deforested. (Emphasis added.)

It is prevalent in Graciliano Ramos’s *Vidas Secas*:


He became saddened. He considered himself planted in a foreign land! Mistake. His fate was to wander the earth, travel up and down led by a tow-rope, like a wandering Jew. A vagabond, pushed around by the drought.

It serves as the backdrop in Almeida’s *A Bagaceira*:

*Era o êxodo da seca de 1898. Uma ressurreição de cemitérios antigos – esqueletos redivivos, com o aspecto terroso e o fedor das covas podres. Os fantasmas estropiados como que iam dançando, de tão trôpegos e trêmulos, num passo arrastado de quem leva as pernas, em vez de ser levado por elas...Expulsos do seu paraíso por espadas de fogo, iam, ao acaso, em descaminhos, no arrastão dos maus fados. Fugiam do sol e o sol guiava-os nesse forçado nomadismo... Mais mortos do que vivos... Pupilas do sol da seca* (De Almeida 5).

[It was the exodus of the drought of 1898. A resurrection of the old cemeteries – revived skeletons, with a terrifying aspect and the stench of rotten graves. The exhausted specters, so unsteady and shaky, going along as if dancing, dragging feet which barely held them up...Driven from their paradise by swords of fire, going at random, roaming in the dragnet of evil fate. They were fleeing the sun and the sun guided them in this forced nomadism...more dead than alive...wards of the drought sun.]
It appears in *La Montagne ensorcellée*:

*La terre crayeuse se craquelle comme l’écorce, entrouve des lèvres avides: le village à soif. La sécheresse dure depuis des jours et des jours, brûle la récolte de petit-mil. Le bétail maigrit et pousse de longs meuglements douloureux* (Roumain 1972 (1931), 86).

[The chalky soil forms bark-like cracks, half opens avid lips: the village is thirsty. The drought lasts for days on end, burning the crops of millet. The livestock grows thinner and emits long, painful brays.]

and it is hinted at in Rachel de Queiroz’s play *Lampião*: *Pois é bom alguém tratar de arranjar água. Se a gente mata a sede, agüenta a fome muitos dias* [Well it’s good that someone try to arrange for water. If you kill the thirst, people are able to resist hunger for several days] (Queiroz 58). Whether described with objective distance (as in Roumain or Almeida) or via subjective voice (as in Ramos or Queiroz), the drought is an oppressive source of preoccupation, regulating the lives of those it touches. The barrenness of the landscape becomes a metaphor for the meagerness of peasant existence. The drought represents a sort of passive yet inescapable violence, a powerful and pervasive force that carries the threat of annihilation.

It is in this scorched earth milieu that the peasant struggles to exist, with the constant menace of death. Indeed, death is a permanent companion as tied to the land as the peasant, ready to overtake him or her on a whim. The paradox of the sun as a giver and taker of life is succinctly captured by Almeida: “*O sol que é para dar o beijo de fecundidade dava um beijo de morte longo, cáustico, como um cautério monstruoso*”

[The sun which is for giving the kiss of fecundity gave a long, caustic kiss of death, like a
monstrous cauterant] (De Almeida 23). Overcoming the conditions of a hostile environment is just one of the several dangers the peasant must navigate.

This over-determination of the land-peasant link camouflages, however, the Universalist strain also present in the works. The drought, after all, can also be read as a dually-coded sign, also serving to underscore the notion of a shriveling up of the nation’s cultural identity under the onslaught of foreign representations that one must fight against. These foreign signs, undecipherable to the majority of the population, lead to an “unhomeliness”, forcing one out of one’s element and perpetuating a destabilizing crisis of identity due to its displacement of the self. Like Price-Mars and Ramos, these writers are attuned to the interhemispheric polemical debates about cultural processes and the proliferation of literary developments in the Americas. The Indigenists and Regionalists also endeavor to bring awareness to the plight of the poor and disenfranchised while valorizing an alternative existence that is not part of the mainstream (but lived, paradoxically, by significant numbers of the population). They too are writing to a specific audience while engaging in literary experimentation.

Encouraged by a large U.S. publishing house such as Macmillan, the writers of Haiti, Brazil and other Latin American nations, knowing of their limited readership at home, found an outlet for greater exposure abroad. Macmillan created a prize competition for best new Latin America novel, and in an interview, Jorge Amado relates the trajectory of his *The Violent Land*:

\[E\]n 1945, apareció *Tierras del sinfín en los Estados Unidos*, tras un curioso camino. Yo participaba en un concurso organizado por el editor estadounidense Macmillan, un concurso para escritores de América latina. En cada uno de los países participantes un jurado hacía una selección de dos o tres títulos – libros inéditos o no –
que eran enviados a los Estados Unidos. El primer año, por otra parte, el Brasil no figuró, sino únicamente países de lengua española. Un absurdo…al año siguiente incluyeron a Brasil, y también a Haití. Tres libros iban a la cabeza de la selección brasileña: Tierras del sinfín, Fogo Morto, de José Lins do Rego, y un libro de Oswald de Andrade, creo que era Chão….mientras tanto…Knopf me propuso publicar [TDSF]…renuncié al concurso y TDSF apareció por Knopf en 1945. Fueron dos haitianos, creo que hermanos, los que ganaron el premio, con un libro titulado Canapé vert, una buena novela (Amado 1992, 211).

[In 1945 The Violent Land appeared in the United States via a curious route. I was participating in a competition organized by the Publisher Macmillan, a contest for Latin American writers. In each of the participating countries, a jury had selected two or three titles – published or not – that were sent to the United States. The first year on the other hand, Brazil did not participate, only those countries whose language was Spanish. An absurdity…the following year they included Brazil and also Haiti. Three books were at the top of the Brazilian selection: Terras do Sem Fim, Fogo Morto by José Lins do Rego and a book by Oswald de Andrade, I believe it was Chão…in the meantime…. Knopf offered to Publish Terras do Sem Fim…I dropped out of the contest and [TSF] appeared for Knopf in 1945. It was two Haitians, brothers I believe, who won the prize with a book titled Canapé-Vert, a good novel.

Amado points out the prevailing myopia regarding Latinity in the Americas which precluded the participation of Brazil and Haiti in the first year of the competition. The inclusion of writers from those two nations the following year shows the increasing interest for the literary revolutions taking place in both countries at roughly the same period. Indeed the frontispiece of the 1944 edition of Canapé-Vert by Pierre Marcelin and Phillipe Thoby-Marcelin proudly informs its readers: « Roman choisi pour Haïti par le Jury de l’Institut Haïtiano-Américain, le 21 décembre 1942, pour le Deuxième Concours Latino-Américain » [The novel chosen by the Jury of the Haitian-American Institute on
Mercer Cook writes of the significance of the winning of the prize for Haitian writers of the time who by necessity (the literacy rate in Haïti at the time was extremely low), were cultivating a readership beyond their borders: “[T]he Farrar and Rinehart Latin American prize novel [is awarded] to the Marcelin brothers for their Canapé-Vert. The publication of this novel by Les Editions de la Maison Française, and the inclusion of Pétion Savain’s La Case de Damballah in Les Œuvres Nouvelles have furnished additional incentive to aspiring Haitians” (Cook 1946, 406). It was certainly a way of acknowledging the innovations and recognition that Indigénisme had brought to Haitian literature.

With exceedingly high illiteracy rates in both Haiti and Brazil at the start of the twentieth century, it becomes clear that the novelists were sharing their limited readership with the social scientists. This fact of a mutual audience is evident in the way that the ethnographers and writers (this includes the Regionalists, the Indigénistes, the Noiristes as well as the Modernists) reference each other. Just as Price-Mars and Ramos are reading the works of novelists and of their colleagues in the hemisphere, the novelists also cite, directly or indirectly, the influence ethnographers studying culture in the Americas have on them as well as demonstrating that they are reading the works of their literary peers. It is an interactive discourse, one that resembles the negotiated exchange of the observer and the native-informant, sometimes obliquely, often explicitly. Novelist José Lins do Rego writes that he would take drafts of his novels to Ramos in order for the ethnographer (with his extensive studies in psychiatry and psychology) to verify the authenticity of the novelist’s characters (Lins do Rego, 71-72).
Jean-Baptiste Cinéas’s *L’Héritage sacré*, for example, is a dual narrative, one with a parallel structure detailing the life of a young paysan who is called upon to take up the mantle of his late grandfather as the village Houngan (Vodu priest), while providing us a mise en abyme of an American ethnographer, Dr. Benfield, and his native informant colleague, Haitian Dr. Melfort, who discuss other ethnographic monographs, including the works of Price-Mars and J. C. Dorsainvil (the author of *Névrose et Vodu*, which Ramos was reading as we have seen in chapter one), as well as authors of fictional works of ethnographic interest:

[Dr. Melfort:] « On peut aujourd’hui, parler du vaudou sans honte, au nom de la Science. Vous lisez suffisamment bien le français pour analyser, critiquer l’œuvre de nos Confrères J.C. Dorsainvil et Price Mars [sic]. Je vous demanderais de ne pas négliger trois petits livres : « Mimola » d’Antoine Innocent, « La famille des Pitite Caille », de Justin Lhérisson, « La Vengeance de Mama », de Frédéric Marcelin, sous prétexte que ce sont des œuvres d’imagination (Cinéas 77).

[Dr. Melfort: Today, we can speak of Vodu without shame, in the name of Science. You read French well enough to analyse, critique the work of our brethren, J.C. Dorsainvil and Price-Mars. I would ask you not to overlook three small books: *Mimola* by Antoine Innocent, *The Family of Pitite Caille*, by Justin Lhérisson, *Mama’s Revenge*, by Frédéric Marcelin, for the reason that these are works of imagination.]

Cinéas’s didactic work is an intertext with the ethnographic monographs of the period, including the work of U. S. researchers, as well as an intertext with the fiction of his Indigenist compatriots. Indeed, the names of Melville Herskovits and anthropologist George Simpson appear in the dedication of the book. Furthermore, the description of Dr. Benfield leaves little doubt as to the genesis of the character:
[Le] Professeur américain Phillips Benfield… son compagnon et interlocuteur, le Dr. Justinien Melfort…
Le Dr. P. E. Benfield, professeur d'une grande Université Américaine, avait choisi le peuple haitien [sic] comme champ d'étude, quand il eut été sollicité par une Société savante d'écrire un livre de sociologie sur un peuple étranger, de préférence jeune et par conséquent susceptible d'intéresser la Science, par des données nouvelles sur des questions encore confuses et jusqu'ici dédaignées des Spécialistes, telles que le Vaudou. Univetsitaire de carrière, agrégé de philosophie et de science, en tant que publiciste, il s’était signalé de bonne heure à l’attention du monde savant par des études remarquables sur la psychanalyse de Freud, sur des questions d’anthropologie et de psychiatrie [emphasis added] (Cinéas 1946, 67-68).

[American Professor Phillips Benfield… his companion and informant, Dr. Justinien Melfort… Dr. P.E. Benfield, professor of a renowned American university, had chosen the Haitian people for his field of study, when he was asked by an intellectual society to write a work of Sociology on a foreign people, preferably young and consequently likely of interest to Science by providing data on as yet unclear questions still disdained by Specialists, such as Vodu. A career academic, doctorate in philosophy and science, he distinguished himself early in academia by publishing some remarkable studies on Freudian psychoanalysis, on anthropology and on psychiatry.]

The language used by Cinéas is decidedly similar to that in the works and letters of Price-Mars. As discussed in chapter one, both Ramos (whose point of departure was ethnology and psychology) and Price-Mars were very interested in psychoanalysis, so it is not surprising that one of Cinéas’s characters manifests an interest in the discipline, while the other is, coincidentally, a medical doctor. Ramos’s dissertation, titled “Primitivo e Loucura,” reflects the influence of Freudian concepts on his own studies (Sapucaia 1). Cinéas’s character, Dr. Benfield, is closely patterned on those scholars doing ethnography
at the time, most of whom had specialized in other disciplines. Renowned ethnographer Franz Boas, for example, was a physicist by training.

While Cinães uses counterpoint to juxtapose his two ethnographic tales, the first being the daily life of a young paysan tempted by city life, the second focusing on the work of two academics, Rachel de Queiroz uses a different approach in her first play Lampião. She takes for her subject the most notorious cangaceiro in Brazil’s history, Virgulino Ferreira.27 The cultural norms of the nordestinos come across mainly through the dialogue, but Queiroz makes the most of stage directions and descriptions to point out historical aspects regarding the ethnic backgrounds of her characters, their manner of dress, their codes of conduct, aware that the play is to be read and not merely performed.

The Frontispiece of the play informs us of the hybrid nature of the work:

\[
A \text{ vida de Virgulino Ferreira, o famoso Lampião das catingas do nordeste, cujos aspectos lendários e reais muitas vezes se interpenetram na tradição oral e escrita, eis o tema desta primeira experiência teatral de Rachel de Queiroz...[n]este drama, que a autora não classifica de “histórico” no rigoroso sentido da palavra, Rachel de Queiroz, entretanto, procurou acompanhar o mais perto possível a lenda, o anedotário, o noticiário de jornal e as tradições orais e escritas relativas ao mais famoso dos nossos cangaceiros...o seu cuidado pela documentação...dos melhores e mais ricos em autenticidade e contribuição folclórica...}(Queiroz 1953).^{28}
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27 Peter Singelmann. “Political Structure and Social Banditry in Northeast Brazil” Journal of Latin American Studies, Vol. 7, No. 1 (May 1975) 59-83 [62]. Singlemann writes: “Cangaceiros were independent bandits who robbed and killed on their own account rather than for a fazendeiro or political chief, although they often allied themselves with politicians and landholders and even entered into contracts with them.” [There is no translation for Cangaceiros, the closest would be “bandits” but these are localized specifically to the northeast.]

28 See also Peter Singelmann (1975), “Political Structure and Social Banditry in Northeast Brazil,” who cites the following from Optato Gueiros Lampião: Memórias de um Oficial ex-Combatente de Forças Volantes (São Paulo, Linográfica Editôra, 1956) “In January 1926, at the zenith of his career, Lampião received the commission of Captain of the federally enlisted troops that fought the Communist Coluna Prestes in the sertões of Northeast Brazil. His band of cangaceiros received arms, ammunition and money to fight a revolutionary group which had already marched through the interior for two years. While
[The life of the famous Lampião of the miseries of the northeast, whose legend and reality often intersect in the oral and written traditions, is the theme of Rachel de Queiroz’s first endeavor in the theater. In this drama, that the author does not categorize as “historical” in the strict sense of the word, Rachel de Queiroz has sought, however, to follow as closely as possible the legend, the anecdotal, the news item and the oral and written traditions relative to the most famous of our cangaceiros…her careful documentation, supported by the work of diverse authors such as Ranulfo Prata, Melchiades da Rocha, João Bezerra and Leonardo Mota, of the best and most richly authentic contributions to folklore and even in the remembrances of men who personally knew the bandit.]

Queiroz’s work represents an attempt to capture the oral aspect of legend and the written conventions of historical account. It is a contextualization of a notable figure caught in a dialectical relation of power and submission vis-à-vis the State. Lampião’s life and legend are culturally specific with regard to the nordeste, but belong to all of Brazil. Queiroz focuses on the more mundane aspects of her protagonist’s last days and the lives of the nordestinos who negotiate their day-to-day existence under constant threat, both man-made and natural. In either case, the choice is to continue with the accepted way of life of the community or to rebel against it.

While Cinéas’s appropriation of ethnographic technique focuses on the observer-informant model with open references to renowned ethnographers, and Rachel de Queiroz brings us a “documentary” reenactment (note the critic’s use of the term “authentic”), that maintains the oral tradition while adhering to textual form, Jorge

Lampião never made contact with the insurgents, the incident highlights a situation in which the ‘respectable’ government machinery was entangled with a widely-feared outlaw who, during his twenty years as ‘King of the Northeast,’ is said to have killed over 1,000 persons, set fire to some 500 properties, killed over 5,000 head of cattle, raped over 200 women, participated in over 200 battles in the six Northeastern states and was wounded six times.”
Amado utilizes polyphonic voice in *Terras do Sem Fim*. In Chapter II, “The Forest” Amado shifts from omniscient narration in the past tense into what can be called the ‘ethnographic present.’ James Clifford provides an example: “[e]thnographies abound in unattributed sentences like ‘The spirits return to the village at night,’ descriptions of beliefs in which the writer assumes, in effect, the voice of culture” (Clifford 1983, 177). Like the ethnographer speaking into a tape recorder or a documentary filmmaker describing a scene as she witnesses it, Amado provides “photographic” detail of unfolding events as they occur, setting the scene with statements meant to impart an understanding of the “native” view of things to the reader:

The forest! It is not a mystery, it is not a danger, a menace. It is [a] god! No cold wind on this night of rain and lightening gleams. Yet even so, men stand shivering, trembling with the cold as their hearts all but stop beating, the forest-god before them, and fear within. They let fall their axes, their hand-saws and their scythes. With lifeless hands they stand and gaze in terror at the sight of the forest. With eyes wide open, immeasurably wide open, they behold the furious deity there before them…. It is not possible to go on; no human hand may be lifted against the god. They can but fall back slowly, fear in their hearts….The giant wood before them is the world’s past, the beginning of the new world….They are falling back. Slowly at first. Step by step, until they reach the broader path where the thorns and swamps are less numerous. The June rain falls upon them, drenching their clothes and causing them to shiver. But beyond lies the forest – the tempest, phantoms. They fall back (Amado Violent Land 35).

The unnamed narrator who witnesses the scene insists upon the daunting presence of the as yet untamed, deified land, an indomitable spirit. Echoing the Janus-like ethnographic project of Price-Mars and Ramos, Amado codes his giant tree (the Brazilwood/Brazil itself) with the dual aspect of past and future: “The giant wood before them is the world’s
past, the beginning of the new world….” It is against this fearful backdrop that only the boldest of individuals can face life. Further along in his tale, the narrator, switching back to his omniscient-past perspective, provides us with one such individual, whom lesser men are left to admire:

[n]ot even Brasilino, the very symbol of courage – none of them in the entire São Jorge dos Ilhéos region inspired as much awe as did Jeremias the witch-doctor. For the powers at his command were supernatural ones; they could avert the course of bullets, could stop the assassin’s upraised dagger, could turn into harmless water the poison of snakes deadlier, even, than the rattlesnake (Amado 1945, 126).

But Jeremias is more than a simple witch-doctor who relies on his knowledge of the forest’s secrets and mysteries as well as the superstitions of the residents of the backlands. In his description of Jeremias, Amado acknowledges and incorporates the Africanist works of such ethnographers as Arthur Ramos and Edison Carneiro, his friends from the Academia dos Rebeldes days:

[Jeremias] had been a young Negro, fleeing from slavery. The “bush captains” had been on his trail, and he had come into the forest where the Indians dwelt and had never more emerged. He had come from a sugar plantation where his master was in the habit of having him flogged. For many years he bore upon his back the mark of the lash. Not even when his scars had at last disappeared, not even when they told him that the freeing of the slaves had been decreed, would he consent to leave the woods. All that had been long, long ago; Jeremias had lost track of time, he had also lost all recollection of those events. The only memory he had not lost was that of his Negro gods, whom his ancestors had brought with them from Africa and for whom he had been unwilling to substitute the Catholic divinities of his plantation master. Here within the forest he lived in the company of Ogún, of Omulú, of Oxossi, and of Oxolufá, while from the Indians he had learned the secret of medicinal herbs. With his own black deities he was in the habit of mingling those of the aborigines, invoking now one
and now another on those days when someone made his way to the heart of the forest to ask his advice or to seek a remedy of some kind. […] Jeremia’s words were addressed to his gods, to his own gods, those gods that had come from the jungles of Africa – to Ogún, Oxossi, Yansan, Oxulafã, Omolú – and to Exú, as well, who was the Devil himself (Amado 1945, 125-129).

Amado provides us with a vision of *marronnage*, so important in the history of Brazil (a discussion of Palmares, the largest maroon society of Brazil and the subject of two films by Carlos Diegues will follow in chapter four), as well as with evidence of the cultural *métissage* between the European, Native American and African elements of Brazil’s colonial heritage. Jeremias has “lost track of time,” but cultural memory, as Amado illustrates here, is capable of transcending time. Jeremias is the epitome of resistance. He has escaped the slave plantation, rejected the imposition of the Catholic Church and even its syncretic subversion. He has instead embraced the deities of his indigenous neighbors, who coexist in his mind along with those brought by his ancestors from Africa.29 It is a peculiar synthesis of disparate elements.

In *O Negro Brasileiro*, Arthur Ramos discusses the phenomenon of the *curandeiro* or Brazilian Medicine Man: “*A medicina mágica avassalou todos os antros do baixo espiritismo e tornou-se uma sobrevivência dos três syncretismos africano, ameríndio e do folk-lore europeu* [Medicinal magic swallowed all the dens of low spiritualism and turned them into a survivance of the three syncretisms: African, Amerindian and of European folk-lore] (Ramos 1940, 216). Jeremias’s performance of culture has as much to do with tradition as innovation, reflecting the tensions of the evolving Modern State which embraces a foreign model of progress but attempts to

29 Maya Deren makes a similar observation in *Divine Horsemen*, which I will address in chapter four.
codify a national identity. One way the State attempted to do this was by co-opting
cultural symbols, as we shall see in the following section. It is the colonial enterprise that
has brought Jeremias to these lands and more specifically to his exile. But paradoxically,
it is in his quasi-isolation that he can experience the plenitude of his creole culture, free to
mix elements from the New World with those of his Old World (in this case Africa rather
than Europe) memory. Amado preserves the dignity of the character without turning him
into an object of curiosity.

The insistence upon an edenic Africa whose presence-in-absence persists in the
religions, the speech, the comportment of those with African ascendance (before seeping
into the larger culture), is represented in the characterization of Jeremias. It is also
prevalent in the Indigenist novels. In a descriptive passage of La Montagne ensorcellée,
Roumain also alludes to this idealized Africa and its legacy of continuity:

Les paysannes, à pied ou à bourrique, descendent les
sentiers étroits, allant partir au marché lointain les
produits du sol, quelques volailles, du lait. Une allure
balancée les porte vite par les chemins pierreux ou
fangeux : la nuit tombante les ramènera, dans le même
ordre immuable, l’une derrière l’autre, tel que nos ancêtres
marchaient dans la grande forêt africaine (Roumain 1931,
102).

[The peasant women, on foot or on mule, descend the
narrow paths, going to the far-off market to bring the
produce of the sun, some poultry, some milk. A balanced
demeanor brings them quickly along the rocky or mired
paths: nightfall will bring them back, in the same
unchanging order, one behind the other, in the same way as
our ancestors walked in the great African forest.

Both Amado and Roumain depict the forest as a site privileged for the exercising of
culture, an atemporal milieu where cultural memory maintains a permanance and
continuity that defies the passage of time. In the Indigenist and Regionalist novel, the *arrière pays* and the forest represent the possibility of a figurative return to a primeval existence far away from modernist trappings, a naïve antediluvian dream that breeds nostalgia for a lost Africa… « cette nostalgie persistante qu’éprouvent nos paysans pour la terre africaine…» [(T)his persistent nostalgia experienced by our peasants for the land of Africa] (Marcelin & Marcelin 98). It is the longing of exiles for home.

The gods are prevalent in the *roman Indigéniste* as well, certainly in more pronounced fashion than in the majority of *nordestino* novels, where the Church’s influence is considerably diminished, though God is never completely absent (the northeastern coastal city of Salvador da Bahia is an exception where the influence of *Candomblé* and the Catholic church are quite strong) (Béhague 2000, 273). In *Lampião*, for example, the character Maria Déa, leaves her husband and two children and “marries” Lampião in a mock wedding ceremony that has no use for priest or propriety (Queiroz 10).

The rural hinterland is far from the domain of the parish priest and so religious formalities are easy to dispense with. Although the official, State-sanctioned religion has penetrated the backlands to varying degree, there is a lack of oversight. Family structures become less rigid without the direct pressures of the influential Church there to keep watch over the minute details of married life and parenting. This fluidity fuels another motive for violence and bloodshed: romantic rivalry, which has awful consequences in *Lampião, Canapé-Vert, Terras do Sem Fim, Gouverneurs de la Rosée*, for example.

In the Haitian Indigenist novel, an especially strong element of didacticism permeates the rural landscape; on one level describing the quotidian experiences of the
paysans, on another level providing authors a platform for displaying cultural elements they deem representative to their reading audience. The writers are writing for their peers, members of their class, and as the novels gain international relevance, a foreign public. For the domestic audience then, the attempt is to raise consciousness about how their compatriots live, unburdened by the influences which trouble the writers themselves, who are wrestling with issues of representation. For the foreign audience, the aim is to counter the image of the sensationalist travel writers. Religion becomes a vehicle for revealing particularity as well as universality. The particularities of Voudou are highlighted along with its syncretic relationship to Catholicism, while the writers also argue for its inclusion in the community of world religions dating back to antiquity. Though the Church eventually makes its way into the hinterland, religion is a constant in the lives of the paysans from the time that they are born:

Jean-Marie est le père savane. Dans les campagnes haïtiennes reculées, là où il n’y a ni église, ni curé, le prêtre savane est souvent un ancien sacristain de village, qui exerce un sacerdoce bénévole et lucratif. Jean-Marie habitait le bourg le plus proche et comme il n’y existait point de chapelle, il officiait à domicile (Roumain 1931, 108).

[Jean-Marie is the rural priest. Deep in the Haitian backlands, where there is neither church, nor parson, the rural priest is often a former country sexton who practices a benevolent and lucrative priesthood. Jean-Marie lived in the nearest town and since there was no chapel, he officiated at home.]

The arrival of Jean-Marie into the backlands is met with amused interest as the residents are aware that he is there to “convert” them out of their “superstitions.” Roumain has his characters openly scoff at what they see as a futile attempt by the Church to separate
them from their traditions. Father Jean-Marie is more impressive to the village residents for his mastery of French and Latin than for his faith. In an amusing scene, the contrast between cultural elements plays out at funeral services for a rural paysan:

Jean-Marie tire de sa poche son paroissien et ses lunettes cerclées d’acier. Le voici prêt : le livre tendu plus haut que la tête inclinée en arrière, car ses verres ont tendance à glisser sur son nez plat et large.

- De profundis clamavi ad te Domine....Domine, quis sustinebit.

Bouche bée, Désilus admire : ce Jean-Marie, quand même, est un grand nègre.

- ...sporavit anima mea in Domino....La voix de Jean-Marie enfle majestueusement:- .... ex omnibus iniquitatibus ejus.

- Oui, foutre ! Commabo (1) Tonnerre! Éclate Désilus avec enthousiasme.- Paix là, macaque ! crie Jean-Marie furieux.

[...]

- ... piis supplicationibus consequantur : Qui vivis et regnas Deus...Que dit cet homme noir ? Que chante-t-il ? Non, non, ce n’est pas ça. Voici ce qu’il faut chanter:

- Feuilles ho, feuilles, vini sauvé mouin dans misè mouin yé. Pitite mouin malade, ma allé caille hougan [sic] (Roumain 1931, 111-113).

- Paix, Anna, paix !

- Pitite mouin malade, m’allé caille hougan. Si ou bon hougan, vini sauver dans misè mouin yé.

[Jean-Marie takes his prayer book and his steel-rimmed glasses. He is now ready: the book held higher than his head, leaning backward as his glasses have a tendency to slide down his flat and broad nose.

-De profundis clamavi ad te Domine....Domine, quis sustinebit

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30 In one of several footnotes, the author provides the definition as « Prêtres, sorciers de la religion vaudou. » The translation provided for the Creole texte into French is « O feuilles, feuilles, venez me sauver de ma misère. Mon enfant est malade, j’ai été chez le sorcier. O, si tu es bon sorcier, sauve-moi de la misère où je suis. »
Slack-jawed, Désilus admires: this Jean-Marie is indeed a big shot.
-
-...sporavit anima mea in Domino...Jean-Marie’s voice rises majestically:
-
-.... ex omnibus iniquitatibus ejus.
-Yes, damn it! Commabo (1) By thunder! Désilus exclaims enthusiastically.
-
-Peace, monkey! Cries Jean-Marie furiously.
[..]
-
-... piis supplicationibus consequantur: Qui vivis et regnas Deus...What is this black man saying? What is he singing?
No, no, that’s not it. This is what he must sing:
-
-Leaves ho, leaves, come save me from the misery I’m in. My child is sick, I’ll go to a hougan’s house.
-
-Peace, Anna, Peace!
-
-My child is sick, I’ll go to a hougan’s house. If you’re a good hougan. If you are a good hougan, come save me from the misery I’m in.]

In this relatively brief exchange, Roumain has highlighted the socio-cultural, religious and linguistic facets of Haiti, juxtaposing the Creole religion Vodu with Roman Catholicism, as well as hinting at the debate over cultural authenticity being advanced:
“this is what he must sing,” states the peasant woman Anna, as she counters the priest’s Latin with Haitian Creole, for which Roumain provides a translation in standard French.
The focus on the “leaves” points to the importance of another element in the lives of peasants, traditional medicine, itself the object of study of another subfield of Ethnology: ethnobotany.

The intermingling of cultural heritage with its syncretism, its play upon memory and adherence to ritual, and of its socio-historical consequences is also explored in depth in Cinéas’s novel. Here, the hougan Baltazar gives a detailed genealogy of his family:

[I’m the seventh « servant of the Loas » (1) of Three Miracles. The head of our family was brought from Africa by White Frenchmen, long ago, long, long ago, perhaps a century before the War of Independence. They were named Asson…he was accompanied by his three brothers: Nabo, Muzi, Ganika. They had to allow themselves to be baptized, and a Christian name was added to their African names, but it’s the name of their master, the colonizer Balthazar, that prevailed. Despite their baptism, they continued to profess their “Guinean” religion, pure and without mixture.]

Syncretism is highlighted by the Indigenists in the foregrounding of the mixing of religious elements and the novels include descriptive passages where prayers and songs appear in Creole, Latin and French and are part of liturgical ceremonies: « Maintenant il emmêlait prières, chants vaudouesques, chants populaires catholiques, chants liturgiques… » [Now he mixed prayers, Vodu songs, popular Catholic songs, liturgical hymns…] (Cinéas 59). This cultural observation is echoed in the Marcelin brothers’s Canapé-Vert: « [D]es litanies en latin, créole et langage, où se mêlaient étrangement des noms de loas, aux consonances africaines, et de saints du calendrier romain » [L]itanies in Latin, Creole and in tongues, where the African-sounding names of the loas and the Saints of the Roman calendar were oddly intermingling] (Marcelin & Marcelin 94). The
métissage occurring within the text and its focus on cultural elements is the type of use of ethnography that Price-Mars called for in *Ainsi parla l’Oncle*:

> Toutes les cérémonies vaudouesques – évocations, initiations, exorcismes, rites piaculaires, etc. – ne s’accomplissent qu’au rythme dolent des chants liturgiques d’une ligne aussi simple que le plein-chant. Il nous semble qu’il y aurait lieu d’étudier ces thèmes et d’en tirer des poèmes, des pièces dramatiques d’une veine originale et neuve (1928, 180).

[All of the Vodu ceremonies – evocations, initiations, exorcisms, piacular rites, etc. – are only accomplished by the doleful rhythm of liturgical chants as simple as the *plein-chant*. It seems to us that there would be room to study these themes and to get poems from them, theatrical plays in a new and original vein...]

These observations are only one facet of the work of Indigenist writers who seek to fill their novels with the type of cultural information found in ethnographic monographs.

Much of the content details the rituals involved in Vodu ceremonies or peasant wakes, informing readers of the procedural aspects with an attempt at clinical detachment:

> Elle se fit apporter un bol rempli de farine de blé, puis se dirigea lentement vers le poteau-mitan de la tonnelle, s’agenouilla, et avec des pincées qu’elle prenait dans le bol, elle traça sur le sol un grand cercle et autres signes ésotériques représentant Damballah Oueddo. Ensuite, ayant fait des libations de vin blanc sur le dessin, elle en baisa tous les symboles au point où elle les avait arrosés (Marcelin & Marcelin 62).

[She had a bowl filled with wheat flour brought to her, then went slowly toward the center post of the arbor, knelt and with pinches that she took from the bowl, she traced a large circle and other esoteric symbols representing Damballah Oueddo on the ground. Afterwards, having poured libations of white wine on the drawing, she kissed all of the symbols where she had moistened them.]
Such a thorough account is illustrative of the move away from a mimetic literature that dominated Haitian writing since the first novel published by a Haitian writer, Emeric Bergeaud’s *Stella* (1859).

But not all such descriptive passages are meant to relay a merely observational account of a cultural event. As we know, these sometimes serve a narrative function that borders on sensationalism, representing an attempt to capture and portray the perceived superstition of the *paysan* in dramatic fashion or else including an account that titillates the reader. The following passage from *Canapé-Vert* is just one of such recurring narrative strategies:

> Après quoi, elle plaça une cigare dans la bouche du mort et une bouteille de clairin près de sa tête, lui arma la main droite d’une pierre, en disant : « Le cigare, c’est pour que tu fumes en route ; la bouteille de clairin, pour te donner du courage ; le poignard, pour que tu te venges de Kinda ; la pierre, pour que tu lui écrases la tête... » Et il arriva qu’au jour fixé par la femme de Jeanlusse, on trouva Kinda assassiné dans son lit. Il avait la poitrine trouée comme une passoire et la tête écrassée sous une pierre (Marcelin & Marcelin 56).

[After which she placed a cigar in the mouth of the corpse and a bottle of moonshine close to his head; armed his right hand with a rock, saying: “The cigar is so that you may smoke on the journey; the bottle of moonshine to give you courage; the dagger so that that you may take revenge on Kinda; the rock so that you may smash his head...” And it happened that on the day that Jeanlusse’s wife had set, Kinda was found murdered in his bed. His chest was riddled with holes like a strainer and his head smashed by a rock.]

Vengeance, petty jealousies, romantic rivalries, mysteriously induced illnesses or violent rages that lead to bloodshed are narrative elements that appear in several of the novels.
Religion is only one marker at the disposal of the Regionalist and Indigenist writers in their efforts to highlight the cultural processes at work in the Americas.

Reflecting the type of fluid family structures found in Gilberto Freyre’s *Casa Grande e Senzala*, whereby the black female servant of the plantation often served as a surrogate mother for the children of the master, in *Terras do Sem Fim*, Amado includes a powerful frontier family and the woman who works for them. It is her relationship with the child of her patrons as well as her with her own offspring that is reminiscent of the type of household interaction described in Freyre’s work:

Don’Ana and Raimunda had grown up together in their early years, one on each of Risoleta’s arms, one at each of her breasts. On the day that Don’Ana was baptized, the little mulatto girl, Raimundo was baptized also. It was black Risoleta herself who picked the godparents: Sinhô, who was only a few months old. The priest had made no protest; for even then the Badarós were a power before which the law and religion bent the knee. […] Raimunda had grown up in the Big House, for she was Don’Ana’s “milk sister”…Donna Filomena, who was a good pious woman, was accustomed to say that since Don’Ana had taken Raimunda’s mother, the Badarós had to do something for the little mulatto girl. It was the truth: black Risoleta had eyes for only one thing in the world, and that was “her white daughter,” her “little darling,” her own Don’Ana (Amado 1945, 92).

Risoleta is symbolic of a woman so entrenched in the assimilationist norms handed down from the colonial period that she is alienated from her own child. The center of her world is the Badarós daughter; Risoleta’s flesh and blood is relegated to the margins, relying on the pity of her mother’s patrons. The passage reminds one of Arthur Ramos’s initial studies in psychology and cultural identity, the foundations of his ethnographic research which looked at alienation and race relations.
The backlands are presented as a site of refuge from the cosmopolitan centers that are perceived as infected by Eurocentrism and tainted by the paralyzing force of mimetism. But the refuge is deceptive, as the writers illustrate, for the backlands operate under a different set of uncompromising (as opposed to imported and thus compromised) rules and circumstances: violence, drought, lawlessness, misery, revenge, relative isolation. The richness of the texts serves as counterpoint to the meagerness of peasant existence. The apport of ethnographic stylistics imbues the writings of the Regionalists and the Indigenists with a particular relevance in the discourse of cultural and national identity taking place in Brazil and Haiti respectively, most acutely in the early decades of the twentieth century. Those debates were fraught with political consequences, as we shall see in the following section.

**Contesting National Identities: Disputing Signification**

*Há muitas formas de dizer a verdade. Talvez a mais persuasiva seja a que tem a aparência de mentira.*

– José Américo de Almeida

Like the *Indigénistes* who looked to peasant life for what they believed to be an untainted existence, the Regionalists saw in the neglected backlands (neglected socially, politically, culturally), what appeared to them a truer, more authentic Brazil than existed in the southern metropolises, Rio de Janeiro and São Paulo. The notions of authenticity and “true” representations are highly problematic, since these are heavily mediated

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31 José Américo de Almeida. *A Bagaceira* Coleção Agarana 13ª edição Rio de Janeiro 1974 (1928) [1] [There are many ways to tell the truth. Perhaps the most persuasive is the one that most resembles a lie.]
through the prisms of subjectivity and ideology. It cannot be sheer coincidence that the Brazilian Regionalists and their Haitian Indigéniste counterparts ranged (in the majority) from left-leaning engagés to full-fledged communists, or that both Brazil and Haiti are traversing moments of extreme political tensions at the time. It seems rather facile an argument to state (as is sometimes the case), that the writings of these novelists are simply the end result of their political ideologies. To merely characterize a work such as Roumain’s Gouverneurs de la rosée as Marxist is, I believe, to limit the reading of the text to strictly ideological terms without due attention to its ethnographic vein (bearing in mind that ethnography itself is framed within ideology), as well as to diminish its intertextual relevance. The Regionalists and Indigenists are rewriting in narrative form, in a sense, the ethnographies of the social scientists that they, by their own vivid accounts, are reading.

My argument here is that the dialectical exchange between ethnographic concerns, literary experimentation and semiotic representation is the engine that propelled an ever-increasing radicalization of political and cultural ideologies in the face of growing efforts at containment by governments engaged in power struggles with insurgents. By the first third of the twentieth century a discourse and counter-discourse of competing interpretations of symbols and codes fueled opposing views of national identity and cultural relevance. The debates on authenticity took on the aspects of provocative confrontation: For the Indigénistes cultural identity served as a means of defining the nation; for the Noiriste faction, cultural identity was predicated on race; for the Brazilian Regionalists the common folk defined cultural identity; for the Brazilian Modernists cultural identity stemmed from a worldview that embraced “Order and
Progress,” yet sought liberation from imposed constraints. This is of course an oversimplification, but it orients the reader to the predominant understanding of how to frame the findings of researchers such as Ramos, Price-Mars, Freyre and others as they were applied in fictional works, and to what ends. These debates and developments were taking place in a context of competing political ideologies.

The pro-Modernist factions were firmly entrenched in the progressive model. Feeling the need to break with the past and embrace the future, to compete on the world stage and to cut off those elements seen as refractorily regressive and tied to the past. The Regionalists and Indigenists for their part were making attempts at (re)claiming symbols in an effort to recode them in a counter-hegemonic discourse at odds with the State apparatus, which was laying its own claims that the coding of symbols pertained to its sovereign domain. The formal institutionalization of culture and cultural symbols that gave rise to new museums, for example, was not without its own problematic set of norms. As Brazilian scholar Abdios do Nascimento points out:

Black artistic production was often considered as a document of “pathological minds,” in which case it would be requested by psychiatrists and mental institutions; in other instances such sculptures, symbols, and ritual objects bore testimony to the “criminal nature” of the authors, and ended up in the police museums (Do Nascimento 1978, 401).

As noted in chapter one, Arthur Ramos’s career began with the study of the supposed mental illnesses attributed to Brazilian blacks and their perceived inabilities to assimilate; a supposition which he came to strongly denounce. While the State embraced Freyre’s articulation of Brazil as a “racial democracy” it attempted to clamp down on voices of
dissent. Jorge Amado’s tongue-in-cheek comments regarding the methods of stifling a competing discourse exposes the bias in the fight for assigning meaning:

[C]umpre notar um curioso detalhe: só é considerado engagé e comprometido, merecedor de censura e culpado de manchar a pureza da literatura, quem se compromete com o povo, se engaja nas batalhas da libertação da sociedade actual; os que se comprometem e se engajam do outro lado, não sei por que espécie de mistério, jamais são acusados, sua literatura não sofre restrições, continua da maior pureza e jamais contra ele se levanta a acusação de participante e política. São mistérios da crítica literária que um modesto romancista baiano não pode perceber (Amado 1964, 45).

[I began to notice a curious detail: the only ones who are considered engagé and committed, deserving of censure and blamed for staining the purity of the literature, are those who identify with the people, who engage in liberation struggles in contemporary society; those who commit themselves and enlist for the other side, I don’t know by what mysterious process, are never accused, their literature isn’t subject to restrictions, they go on in the purest fashion and no accusations are ever launched against them regarding political partisanship. These are mysteries of literary criticism that a modest Bahian novelist cannot understand.]

The primary options afforded the majority of these writers (including Graciliano Ramos, René Depestre, Jorge Amado, Jacques Roumain) by the State, became jail, exile, or both. In the attempt to be the sole arbiter of symbolic inscription, the State (whether

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32 David Nicholls “Ideology and Political Protest in Haiti, 1930-1946” Journal of Contemporary History vol. 9, No. 4 (Oct., 1974) 3-26 [15] “Roumain spent most of the thirties in prison and in exile, returning to Haiti in 1941.” Phillipe Bernard, « Rêve et littérature romanesque en Haiti : de Jacques Roumain au mouvement spiraliste » En 1930, après des troubles sérieux contre le président Borno, pion des USA, Roumain fonde la « ligue de la jeunesse patriote haïtienne ». En 1932, il est à nouveau arrêté et emprisonné...Jacques Roumain fonde le premier parti communiste haïtien et il est à nouveau arrêté...À sa sortie, il repart en France et reprend des études d’ethnologie...En 1941, il travaille avec Alfred Métraux en Haïti et devient professeur à l’Institut d’ethnologie, il luttera contre la campagne anti-superstitieuse instaurée par l’Église catholique. [38] In 1930, after serious protests against President Borno, pawn of the USA, Roumain founds the “Patriotic League of Haitian Youth.” In 1932, he is again arrested and
Haiti or Brazil), could not tolerate a counter discourse which contested its authority in the
coding of those symbols and engaged in what amounted to a “hostile takeover” of the
symbols themselves; those opposing the dominant discourse were then marked as anti-
national, dangerous, of succumbing to a “Red” (communist) taint which had to be
eradicated, or at the least contained, by violent means if necessary. René Depestre,
himself forced into exile, gives an account of this battle over signification:

[En 1934] le fils aîné d’une riche famille mulâtre d’Haïti
décide sans crier gare de fonder le Parti Communiste
Haïtien. Aussitôt connue la nouvelle, le président du pays
fait arrêter Roumain. Sténio Vincent prend aussi un décret
d’interdiction du P.C. Il met ensuite hors-la-loi une liste de
dix mots du Petit Larousse Illustré, tenus pour obscènes et
attentatoires à l’ordre public : capital, syndicat, cellule,
parti, prolétariat, classe, communisme, ouvrier, grève,
révolution. Il fallait chasser sine die ces mauvais sujets du
bon usage des langues française et créole (Depestre 2003,
XXIII).

[In 1934] the eldest son of a rich mulatto family from Haiti,
decided, without shouting “beware!” to found the Haitian
Communist Party. As soon as the news got out, the nation’s
president had Roumain arrested. Sténio Vincent also
outlawed the Communist Party. He then outlawed ten
words from the Petit Larousse Illustré [dictionary], deemed
obscene and harmful to the public order: capital, syndicate,
cell, party, proletariat, class, communism, worker, strike,
revolution. One had to chase off sine die these bad subjects
of the proper usage of the French and Creole languages.]

imprisoned…Jacques Roumain founds the first Haitian Communist party and is once again arrested…Upon
his release he returns to France and resumes his studies in ethnology. In 1941 he works with Alfred
Métraux in Haiti, becomes professor at the Institute of Ethnology and will fight against the Catholic
Church’s Anti-Superstition campaign.

[Dimmick, (1951)]. “[T]he proclamation by Vargas, in November 1937, of the so-called Estado Novo soon
put an end to practically all…forms of public remonstrance. Through the national Departamento de
Imprensa e Propaganda and similar state organizations, an ironclad censorship descended upon the
country. Jorge Amado fled for a while to Argentina…Graciliano Ramos…spent some months languishing
in jail – and contracting tuberculosis as a result.
By discrediting Roumain’s politics and coding him as an outlaw, Vincent’s government called both Roumain’s ethnographic work and his fiction into question, but it extended its reach beyond that. In addition, the suppression of words was consistent with the State plan of domination over all aspects of life and thought and with the hegemony of that faction of the elite determined to resist an overt identification with Africa as a cultural source. The Catholic Church proved a powerful ally, both in the repudiation of communism and of peasant “superstition” (as Vodu was coded). Cinéas captures the attitude of this group in his novel *L’Heritage sacré*: « On n’applique pas de sanction assez sévère contre ces Africains superstitieux, incorrigibles, réfractaires à la Civilisation et à la Religion. Ces sauvages nous font décrier à l’étranger et empèchent notre évolution… » [We don’t take extreme enough measures against these superstitious, incorrigible Africans, obstacles to Civilization and to Religion. These savages make foreigners denounce us and prevent our evolution] (Cinéas 42).

Apart from the derogatory remarks, it is interesting that Cinéas’s text rhetorically refers to Africans. In so doing, Cinéas takes up his position as an *Indigéniste*. By inscribing the peasants (and those who identify with them) as such, Cinéas shows how the State-Religious-Elite discourse achieves two things: it seeks to mock those Haitians (i.e. the Indigenists) who are presented as attempting to be something they are not (for all of the identification with African culture, Haitians are not Africans), while coding the peasant religion as an obstacle to modernist advancement, “savages” in opposition to Civilization, an echo of the remnants of 19th century diffusionism.

But by insisting on the use of the word “Africans” Cinéas is also gesturing toward the Indigenist discourse that looks to Africa as an undervalued source of Haitian culture.
In this sense, “African” becomes the double of “Haitian” in a dually coded sign. We can see how closely Cinéas captures the perception regarding Vodu and the triumvirate of the State, the Church and the Elite in the following citation from David Nicholls:

[T]he controversy concerning the so-called ‘anti-superstition’ campaign conducted by the Roman Catholic church with support from the state, in 1941-1942. This campaign can be said to have been initiated by Bishop Paul Robert of Gonaïves, who, in a pastoral letter of April 1941 pointed to the ‘absolute incompatibility, the irreconcilable opposition, between christianity and superstition… [b]y superstition he meant the ‘collection of religious beliefs and practices which came from Africa’. In the following week Elie Lescot was elected president of the country and he made it clear that ‘my government will be a catholic government’ (Nicholls 1974, 11).

As several studies on syncretic processes in the context of religion attest however, Monsignor Robert overstates the “absolute incompatibility, the irreconcilable opposition, between christianity and superstition,” because of his refusal to consider Vodu as a religion. In *Bon Dieu rit* (God Laughs), Edris Saint-Amand points out the hypocrisy of an elite which despite appearing to adhere to the tenets of the anti-superstitious campaign, still counts a significant number of its members among the syncretic practitioners of Vodu and Catholicism:


[Aren’t all of the Catholics damned in advance? They have the right to worship Mistress [Erzulie], Legba, to offer “services” to make “ouangas”, and at the same time go to church and take communion. No opposition between these things, in truth…]
The Catholic Church, which severed ties to Haiti after the Revolution of 1804, did not send clergy to the island nation again until the *concordat* was signed with the Vatican in 1860. Members of the elite, having felt abandoned and decrying that the country was being overtaken by superstitious paganism, welcomed the European clergy and supported the anti-superstitious campaigns of the 1940s. This effort can be seen as a means of counteracting the assertive momentum of the Indigenist movement and its didactic aims. Several of the texts depict Vodu ceremonies and rites in explicit detail. In *L’Héritage sacré* Cinéaste’s ethnographers discuss this phenomenon:

[[Dr. Benfield]: *Ce peuple *haïtien* est gratuitement calomnié par ceux-là qui font profession de l’exploiter et pas une voix ne s’élève pour prendre sa défense. Je suis venu. Je vis, seul étranger, seul blanc au milieu de cette population aimable qui me gâte à l’envi ; de tous, je ne reçois que des marques de respect, de considération et d’amitié….au début, je craignais quelque méfiance de la masse, étant donné les fâcheux et récents précédents de professionnels de scandale qui trafiquent effrontément de leur talent….Malheureusement le public américain, trop crédule dans sa passion du « sensationnel » accorde à ces fables ridicules le plus grand crédit.

[Dr. Benfield]: *Mais la science, finalement, triomphera* !

[Dr. Melfort]: *En attendant, le peuple haitien [sic] devant le monde, est une bande de sauvages qui s’adonnent au fétichisme, à la superstition, à l’anthropophagie* (Cinéas 73).

[Dr. Benfield]: The Haitian people are gratuitously slandered by those who make it a profession to exploit it and not one voice rises to its defense. I came. I live, lone stranger, only white man in the midst of this likeable people who spoils me rotten; from everyone I receive only respect, consideration and friendship…at first, I feared the people’s wariness, given the infectious and recent precedents of the professional scandalmongers who boldly traffic their talent….Unfortunately the American public, overly credulous in its zeal for the “sensational” gives these ridiculous fables the utmost credence.

[Dr. Benfield]: But science will finally triumph!
[Dr. Melfort]: In the meantime, before the world the Haitian people are a band of savages who (s’adonner), to fetishism, to superstition, to anthropophagy.]

The dialogues between Cinéas’s two doctors echo the exchanges between Price-Mars and Ramos as discussed in chapter one, particularly with respect to the books of American authors Seabrook and Craige. The fact that Benfield is an outsider, “I came” he states, is mediated by the notion that he has “triumphant Science” to support him in opposition to those travel writers in search of mere sensationalism. Furthermore, as the following citation from Viatte shows, it could easily be a reference to Melville Herskovits’s fieldwork in Haiti during the time that he was preparing his monograph Life in a Haitian Valley:

Although the practice of voodoo (more properly vodun) was restricted by law and disavowed by the Francophile elite, it was widespread throughout the country and, further, was – in the 1920s and 30s – being reappraised by Haitian acknowledged to be a hybrid: far from being an unspoilt ‘traditional’ religion, it actually combines African and Catholic elements….The most important factor, however, which differentiates Herskovits’s anthropology [Life in a Haitian Valley] from that of his peers is the large and influential body of sensationalist writing on Haiti against which he felt he had to engage, the work of Seabrook above all…The result is a rather polemical work which repeatedly counters the key image of this literature with an insistence on the sheer banality of Haitian village life (Pettinger 150).

While the Haitian State was redefining itself after the end of the Occupation in 1934 by refashioning Vodu as theatrical entertainment (even as it attempted to clamp down on it as religious practice) and courting tourists and internationally known artists, in Brazil, Vargas was laying the blueprint for his Estado Novo. Legislative and canonical laws were enacted in both countries to combat the proliferation of afro-American religions, viewed
as “backward” elements antithetical to the aims and visions of the “new” State. Jorge
Amado: l’un des conflits majeurs du Brésil et qu’on doit en tenir compte : le conflit
Nord-Sud. Le Nord, le Nordeste, colonisés par le Sud industriel (Amado Conversations
220). [One of the major conflicts of Brazil and one that we must consider: the North-
South conflict. The North, the Northeast, colonized by the industrial South]. The
following citation from Georges Boisvert is an observation concerning the Brazilian
sertão:

L’évolution postérieure du pays renforça une configuration
générale caractérisée par le contraste entre le Brésil des
régions proches de la côte et le Brésil des Sertões. D’un
côté des zones dynamiques, à forte densité de population,
avec la plupart des grandes villes où se concentrent la
richesse, la culture et le pouvoir, lieux ouverts aux
échanges avec l’extérieur et au progrès. De l’autre de
vastes espaces au peuplement clairsemé, parfois vides, que
leur éloignement et leur isolement vouent à la stagnation et
à la misère….Roger Bastide…n’hésite pas à parler d’
« antagonisme de deux civilisations. » Jacques Lambert
estime que l’on est en présence de deux sociétés qui,
n’ayant pas progressé au même rythme, n’ont pas atteint le
même degré de développement : ce qui les sépare n’est pas
une différence de nature mais une différence d’âge
(Boisvert 172).

[The late evolution of the country of the reinforced a
general configuration characterized by the contrast between
the Brazil of the coastal regions and the Brazil of the
Sertões. On one side, dynamic zones, densely populated
with mostly large cities with a concentration of wealth,
culture and power, sites open to exchanges with the outside
and with progress. On the other side vast, sparsely
populated spaces, sometimes empty, their distance and their
isolation leading to stagnation and misery…Roger
Bastide…does not hesitate to speak of “two antagonistic
civilizations.”] Jacques Lambert posits that we are in the
presence of two societies that, not having progressed to the
same rhythm, have not attained the same degree of
development: what separates them is not a difference in
nature but a difference of age. (Emphasis added.)]
The symbolic backwardness or atemporality ascribed to the solitary sertão is precisely the attraction for the Brazilian Regionalists, just as remote or isolated cultures traditionally formed the primary interests of early ethnographers. Johannes Fabian points out this “politics of time” in anthropology and the long-standing practice whereby anthropologists “[w]ith the help of various devices of sequencing and distancing [assign] to the conquered populations a different Time (Fabian 1983, 30).” The word sertão for example, designating the arid northeastern interior is itself already heavily coded: « Le mot sertão, dont l’étymologie reste incertaine…figure dans la plupart des textes concernant les Grandes Découvertes avec la signification d’« intérieur des terres », d’« arrière pays », par opposition au littoral. Il a conservé ce sens, notamment au Brésil où, au milieu du vingtième siècle, il s’applique encore à toute région mal connue, faiblement peuplée, lointaine et quelque peu mystérieuse » [The word sertão, whose etymology remains uncertain…figures in the texts regarding the Great Discoveries with the signification of “interior lands”, “backlands”, in opposition to the coast. It has kept this meaning, notably in Brazil where, in the middle of the twentieth century, it is applied to all unfamiliar regions, sparsely populated, remote and somewhat mysterious] (Boisvert, 171). By extension then, the designation sertanejo (a resident of the sertão) signifies an outsider, rugged, distant, different, Other as Judy Bieber observes in her article: “To coastal and urban Brazilians….sertanejos [were] people of the interior sertão, possessing an untamed and dangerous ethnic identity forged by a harsh and unforgiving environment” (Bieber 1998, 40).
The cultural dissonance between the outward-looking urban centers and the inward-coded hinterland provided the material for disputed significations, well under way even prior to independence:

The meaning of “being Brazilian” was contested on multiple levels: ethnicity – Portuguese versus Brazilian-born; race – white, mulatto, black, or Indian; birth – free versus slave; and culture – modernizing and European versus traditional and afro-Brazilian (Bieber 64).

[...] The sertão [was characterized] as a psychological frontier that represented a potentially hostile space inhabited by marginal types that included Indians, bandeirante adventurers, cowboys, criminals, fugitives, deserters, and quasi-feudal lords. [...] “It was barbarous, chaotic, unchristian, uncivilized, and hostile to those values and tenets – justice, Christianity, orderliness, stability, good governance – which the Portuguese held dear. It was a region forsaken by God and unknown to civilized man. In short, civilization and orthodoxy stopped where the sertão began. The concept was essentially ethnocentric, the conceit of colonial administrators, Catholic missionaries, and colonists who prided themselves as representatives of civilization as understood by the Portuguese” (Bieber 53-54).

These competing notions of “Brasilidade” were at odds with the State’s aim of establishing one Brazilian identity to which everyone was to conform. After the military coup and the failed communist counter-coup of Luis Carlos Prestes, GêutulioVargas (who had been part of the ruling junta), failed to relinquish power after his elected term ended, establishing the Estado Novo (New State) in 1937.

In this scheme of asserting a modernist norm, among the first casualties in both Brazil and Haiti were the afro-Brazilian (Candomblé, Macumba, Umbanda) and Vodu religions respectively. In both countries, this attempted suppression of African-American
religions had begun in the nineteenth century without tangible success. In the politically charged atmosphere of the 1930s and 1940s, the attempted eradication of these religions took on a new dimension. Those elements perceived as Africanist in origin were seen as undesirable impediments to progress.

The systematic repression of these religions forced their practitioners underground, increased participation in syncretic systems as the faithful adapted to the imposition of the Catholic Church or became new converts who opted to reject their faith. Bieber and Abdias do Nascimento recount the concerted efforts by both the Church and the State in the eradication campaigns:

Toward the end of the nineteenth century and into the twentieth, the Brazilian government began to outlaw Afro-Brazilian practices such as capoeira and samba. Although references to Afro-Brazilian behavior practiced by the povo (folk) were common, evidence of elite participation in such customs is comparatively rare (Bieber 37-72).

Attacked by the Catholic priests, persecuted by the police, the Candomble temples – terreiros – had to be hidden in woods, hillsides, and all sorts of places of difficult access and visibility for the enemies (Do Nascimento 1978, 400).

In The Violent Land, Amado’s character Jeremias, embodies the flight from the two-pronged persecution and the persistence of cultural memory. Evolving in relative isolation, at the margins of the marginalized, Jeremias develops his own syncretic métissage of cultures in contact. Those who require his services know where to go in order to seek out his help.

The issue of religious persecution is also a preoccupation among the Indigenists. As an ethnographer, Roumain wrote articles critical of the Church’s position on behalf of the people, though not out of a sense of piety:
In a series of articles, Jacques Roumain, director of the Bureau d’Ethnologie, attacked the campaign…The Haitian people, he maintained, are no more superstitious than other nations, and the voodoo cult is the vehicle for conserving the folk traditions of the masses. Are not the peasants of Brittany also superstitious? Breton priests do not need to come to Haiti to combat superstition…Roumain, however, thought that voodoo beliefs, like all religious beliefs, were part of a false consciousness, and that they were destined to be replaced by a scientific world view (Nicholls 1974, 13).

Roumain is at once defending the legitimacy of Vodu, and leaving it in the realm of superstition. He insists that it is merely on a par with the superstitions of other cultures and therefore, the Breton priests can begin their combat at home. Price-Mars having made the case for placing Vodu among world religions also explicitly states that one of the reasons for his ethnographic project is the safeguarding of it, though he de-emphasizes the political forces at play and focuses on the destructive nature of time: « C’est pour sauver de la destruction du temps ces manifestations de la conscience populaire que nous avons écrit ces essais. Et c’est parce que nous avons trouvé une belle exploitation littéraire de telles traditions dans les « Esquisses Martiniquaises » de Lafcadio Hearn que nous allons maintenant interroger la littérature haïtienne sur l’emploi qu’elle fait des thèmes de notre folk-lore » [I have written this essay in order to save the manifestations of popular consciousness from the destructive forces of time. And it is because we have found a beautiful literary utilization of such traditions in Lafcadio Hearn’s “Martinican Sketches” that we are now going to examine Haitian literature on its use of our folkloric themes] (Price-Mars 1928, 170).
In an article on Haitian art, Micheal Lerebours recounts an experience between French anthropologist Alfred Métraux and a clergyman in Haiti that illustrates the Church’s vigorous execution of its immediate goals:

“The following is Métraux’s testimonial on acts of vandalism: It is at Croix-des-Bouquets, near Port-au-Prince, that I had the revelation of the force with which the African cults proliferated in Haiti; the enormous pyramid of drums and ‘superstitious objects’ which stood in the presbytery, waiting for the date fixed for the solemn auto-da-fé, was a symbol of it. I spoke in favor of a few pieces, which, for aesthetic or scientific reasons, would have been worth sparing. It was all in vain: the priest explained to me that Haiti’s honor was at stake, and everything had to be destroyed” [emphasis added] (Lerebours 1992, 721).

While the Church occupied itself with a self-proclaimed mission to save Haiti’s soul, the State (and indeed even some members of the elite community), courted some of the most famous practitioners of the Modernist esthetic. André Breton, Wilfredo Lam, Aimé Césaire, Alejo Carpentier were invited to Haiti in the 1940’s as part of a cultural initiative that showed the State’s ambition of turning Port-au-Prince into an intellectually stimulating city. Langston Hughes met with Roumain in Haiti in 1932 during an unofficial visit to the island while Roumain was working in the Ministry of Education (Hughes 1956, 15-37). Mercer Cook offers details regarding the effect of such artistic ferment: “The Haitian government’s cultural crusade…has brought Jacques Maritain, André Maurois, Aimé Césaire…André Breton, Louis Jouvet, Henri Torrès, Geneviève Tabouis, and other distinguished French visitors to Port-au-Prince ” (Cook 1946, 406).

Haitian poet Paul Laraque provides an eyewitness account:

*Port-au-Prince, Haïti, automne 1945. Le journal La Ruche, organe de la jeunesse révolutionnaire, mène le combat contre la dictature du gouvernement rétrograde d’Elie*
Lescot…c'est à cette époque qu’André Breton arriva en Haïti [...] Le 4 décembre, nous sommes un groupe nombreux d’admirateurs à attendre le poète à l’aéroport. Parmi nous, le grand peintre surréaliste cubain, Wilfredo Lam, arrivé peu de jours auparavant. Tête léonine, crinière de soleil, dieu enfanté par la foudre, Breton avance. À le voir, on saisit la beauté de la révolte (Laraque 1971, 126-127). […] Ce que le Surréalisme a représenté, avant tout, pour nous, ça a été le saut dans l’inconnu (Laraque 129).

[Port-au-Prince, autumn 1945. The newspaper La Ruche, tool for the revolutionary youth, fights against the retrograde government of Elie Lescot…it is at this time that André Breton arrived in Haiti […] The 4th of December, we are a numerous group of admirers who wait for the poet at the airport. Among us, the great surrealist, Cuban artist Wilfredo Lam, who arrived a few days prior. Leontine head, mane made of the sun, god sired by thunder, Breton advances. Upon seeing him, we understood the beauty of the revolt. […] What Surrealism represented, above all, for us, was the leap into the unknown.]

In order to adopt a stance of progressive aims, Haitian presidents Lescot and Estimé clearly attempted to position their governments as culturally forward-thinking by embracing Modernism and welcoming some of the most notable practitioners. This was a concerted effort to refute the image of backwardness and superstition plaguing the island nation. Accustomed to the derisive signifiers with which others had traditionally coded it, Haitians had a long history of militance with respect to signification. As Leon-François Hoffman points out, Haitians have combatted an image « placé, pour des raisons bien précises, sous le signe de l’insolite et du dérisoire. L’existence même d’Haïti fut longtemps considérée comme une aberration historique… » [placed, very deliberately so, under the sign of the unusual and the derisive. Haiti’s existence itself was long considered an historical aberration … (emphasis added)] (Hoffmann 1992, 7). Hoffman
elaborates: «les Haïtiens ont toujours refusé de se connaître dans l’image diffamatoire que l’on donnait d’eux et ont proposé une autre, non pas édulcorée mais plus équitable» [Haitians have always refused to see themselves in the defamatory image assigned to them and proposed another, not sweetened but fairer] (Hoffmann 8). Any depiction that valorized elements seen as regressive were therefore antithetical to State ambitions and had to be repressed.

By the time that Price-Mars begins to write around the time of the Occupation, the educational system in Haiti comes under closer scrutiny by members of the Indigéniste movement. The conclusion is that the primary source of alienation is the adherence to the French model: «L’éducation livresque est accusée de former des déracinés…» [Book learning is accused of creating deracinated/rootless individuals] (Viatte 1171-1172). Yet the pull of France and its influence on education as having negative impact was not something the government nor the elite were ready to concede, as the following quote illustrates: «Dans la présentation de La Revue indigène, Normil Sylvain faisait valoir en 1927 que «Dans cette Amérique espagnole et anglaise, nous avons la glorieuse destinée de maintenir […] les traditions et la langue françaises» [In the premiere issue of the Revue indigène in 1927, Normil Sylvain emphasizes that “in this [predominantly] Spanish and English America, we have the glorious destiny of maintaining […] French traditions and language”] (Hoffmann 5). This statement illustrates the internal conflicts of the Indigenists and their varying positions on the Haitian-African-French cultural continuum, culminating in the schism between the creolists and the noiristes, a division which would lead to violent repercussions, culminating in the repressive regime of François Duvalier.
As we shall see in the following chapter, not even a monumental figure in Haitian letters as Price-Mars was immune to this ambivalence. Saint-Amand’s *Bon Dieu rit* includes a passage that illustrates the depth of reach of French influence in Haitian schooling, and the prestige afforded French culture:

*Simon Mareu, directeur de l’école primaire….avait…monté de deux petites représentations théâtrales où l’on avait joué le Cid et Esther et il avait tour à tour incarné Rodrigue et Assuerrus. Les parents d’élèves avaient été heureux de voir leurs enfants dans de beaux rôles, parlant français, et ils n’avaient même pas eu d’hésitation devant les dépenses qu’entraînait l’achat des déguisements* (Saint-Amand 44).

[Simon Mareu, director of the elementary school…had…produced two small theatrical plays: *The Cid* and *Esther* and he had, in turn, played Rodrigue and Assuerrus. The students’s parents were happy to see their children in such fine roles, speaking French and they didn’t even hesitate at spending on the purchases of the costumes.]

The choice of both “The Cid” by iconic French dramatist Pierre Corneille and of “Esther” by the equally influential playwright Jean Racine underscores the influence of the Church and reinforces the overwhelming influence of French Letters. The Cid especially, reintroduces the battle of the Catholic Church against another population of African descent (the Moors of the Iberian peninsula) and shows a continuity of the Church’s fight over what it perceives to be superstition. The choice of the word “*déguisements*” literally “disguises,” leaves open the possibility of an interpretation that goes beyond that of the costumes being worn. It can also point to the pretensions of members of the elite, engaged in disguising their own culture as French, a phenomenon that the Indigenists are determined to unmask. The high cost of the costumes, which the parents are eager to pay
for is perhaps an allusion to the high cost to the nation of people pretending to be what they are not.

As noted in chapter one, French influence was also pervasive in Brazil, and Amado uses recent arrivals to the Northeast, hailing from the southern cities as conduits of French culture to the remote interior. In *Terra do Sem Fim*, Amado also includes passages illustrative of the fetishization of things French and the success of a theatrical play:

She had not even thanked Lucia for these French magazines and the fashion plates (44).…. she had her schoolmates, and with them she read French novels (45).…. For her beauty lay in the life that Lucia was leading: those balls in Paris (46)…. The dream of great cities, of Europe, of imperial balls and Parisian gowns – all that was behind her (46)…. “Baccarat crystal” …. “It is the very refinement of good taste” (81)…. “I like Georges Ohnet….I wept when I read *Le Grand Industriel*” …. “And Zola? Have you read Zola?”…. He had a copy of *Germinal* at Ilhéos [sic]” (84-85)…. The [theater] group…had given its first performance, a drama written by Professor Estanislau entitled The Fall of the Bastille. It had been an enormous success (Amado 1945, 180).

France, and particularly Paris, becomes a longed-for surrogate home. Whether or not the character has actually visited this “spiritual” home is of little consequence. And in a move in which life imitates art, Amado embeds in the text a subtle homage to the icon of literary Realism, French author Emile Zola (1840-1902) and to one of the most popular French novelists of the late Romantics, author Georges Ohnet (1848-1918).

Such Intertextuality abounds in the fictional works as well as the ethnographic texts. In his introduction to *O Negro Brasileiro*, for example, Ramos discusses the polemical issue of racial representation in literature, making such unexpected
comparisons as that between the poetry of Brazilian Castro Alves and American author Harriet Beecher Stowe’s famous novel:

[Introduction: The Great War, the social consequences of the anguished moment in which we live, draw our attention to something up until now only explored in terms of esthetics or of economics, mere chapters in the politics of colonization. Uncle Tom’s Cabin by Harriet Beecher Stowe, or all of the liberation poetry of Castro Alves barely evoke a vague sense of pity for a race which a false logic considers inferior…these poems of “white” pity are not negro narratives but they are negroid. They correspond, in a sense, to the immense Indianist lament without human significance. This “negroid” cycle is an expression of romanticist mystification, hididng the true facets of the problem under the cover of a sickly, sado-masochist sentimentalism, where an exalted pity was, in fact, the polar counterpoint to an unprecedented “negricidal” sadism.]

Once again we find evidence of Ramos’s radical thoughts on the subject of race and representation, this time placed in the context of literature. And when he searches for what he perceives to be emblematic of a true African-American voice, he turns to one of
the luminaries of the Harlem Renaissance: “*Mas é outro poeta negro, Langston Hughes quem agora, em impeto de soberba afirmação, explode a sua prophecia de illuminado: I, too, sing America...*” [But it is another black poet, Langston Hughes who now, with the impetus of proud affirmation, explodes his enlightened prophecy: “I, too, sing America...”] (Ramos 1940, 14).

The reoriented focus on the peasantry as a cultural commodity to be coded with the notion of authenticity is problematic for the most obvious reason: it is the decision of a handful of literate authors who claim to write on behalf of the nation. Ethnography provided the cover of legitimacy to a group that enjoyed certain privileges over their compatriots, whether or not they were in fact reared in the Backlands. It is this question of province that invites debate. How far can ethnographic appropriation take a novelist out of the realm of fiction? The definite *prise de position* of these authors, who ally themselves with the marginalized, the oppressed, the poor, the illiterate gives rise to questions about their interpretation of the aspirations to observational objectivity ethnography embraces. In addition, the multi-faceted rebelliousness, against the dominant State ideology, imported notions of culture, perceived injustices (the list goes on), inevitably begs the question: in the end, who gets to invest cultural symbols with meaning?
Down with the Purists!

Estou farto do lirismo que pára e vai averiguar no dicionário o cunho vernáculo de um vocábulo. Abaixo os puristas!

[…]

Não quero mais saber do lirismo que não é libertação.33

— Manuel Bandeira

With respect to culture, perhaps the only elements the Regionalists, Indigenists and Modernists wholeheartedly agreed upon were breaking with the accepted conventions of language, and the inadequacy of the mimetic literary styles of the majority of their predecessors with their inability to fully convey the complexity of their respective societies. The writers shared a desire for rupture with academically correct usage, generic standards and the model of the Romantic novel. At the linguistic level the Modernist texts reflect the liberties taken with syntax, lexicon, orthography, demonstrating the writers’s preferences for infusing their works with creolisms and neologisms, providing texture by attempting to capture the oral quality of their subjects and environmental context. Contemporary critics of these writers enthusiastically pointed to the departures from traditional literature, embracing these unorthodox approaches. Gilberto Freyre describes the multiplicity of two Regionalist texts in the following citation:


33 Bandeira “Poética”- (2001 (1930))
[I’ve had my fill of lyricism that stops to go and verify the vernacular coinage of a word in a dictionary…Down with the purists! […] I want to know nothing more of any lyricism that isn’t liberation.]
não apenas belas; e são também crônicas, memória, história social, folclore (Amado 1961, 187).

[The year 1943....has given Brazil two truly extraordinary books, *Fogo Morto* by José Lins do Rego and *Terras de Sem Fim* by Jorge Amado...Neither of these two is pure fiction. Neither of the two is strictly a novel nor a novella. Both are hybrids. Both have many impurities in their blood – an element of strong words and not merely pretty ones; and they are also chronicles, memoirs, social history, folklore.]

In stating that the works were not “pure fiction” and making equivalences between “chronicles, memoirs, social history, folklore,” Freyre is upholding the premise of Regionalism as purporting to a representation based on verisimilitude rather than on invention, conforming to Amado’s insistence that his intention is less to create than it is to recount by writing “with a minimum of literature and a maximum of honesty (Amado, *30 anos* (82-83)).” The language of Freyre’s statement “much impurities in their blood,” is an echo of the Iberian discourse of sanguine purity and its insistence on the inevitable degradation of the hybrid, as well as of nineteenth-century misconceptions regarding peoples of “mixed” blood. It is also consistent with the trope of blood as national birthright previously discussed in the novels. Freyre is valorizing this hybridity in his praise of the works he cites, precisely because of their mixed influences.

Critic Antonio Candido writes of the “fórmula da estética do sr. Jorge Amado. *Documento e poesia...*” [the esthetic formula of Mr. Jorge Amado: documentary and poetry...](Amado, *30 anos* 172), while Arthur Ramos advocates for the freedom of artistic expression and the need to break with preconceived notions, to step outside of the mold, to free oneself from the rigidity of schools because “*A Arte requer liberdade, muita liberdade...*” [Art requires liberty, much liberty...] (Amado (Sapucaia) 2003). The
insistence upon a socially grounded literature that did not conform to the rules, that clamored for artistic freedom is everywhere in the regionalist mindset.

In a lengthy commentary on the state of Brazilian literature, Graciliano Ramos explains the motivation behind the realism of the Regionalists and their brand of “fieldwork” and observational methodology in a wry critique of “correct” literature:

There is an antipathetic and insincere literature that only utilizes correct expressions, that only concerns itself with agreeable things, that doesn’t get itself wet on winter days and for that reason doesn’t know that there are people who cannot purchase rain slickers. When it rains, this literature...
stays at home, well warmed with the doors closed. And if it is obligated to go out, wraps itself up, rolls up its neck and raises its eyes, in order not to see the mud on the shoes. It thinks that all is well, that Brazil is a world unto itself and that we are happy…this literature is written for fat citizens, bankers, shareholders, businessmen, property owners, individuals who don’t think that others have any reason to be unhappy. Everything’s great – it exclaims, like a parrot during a shipwreck. Now, it isn’t true that everything is going along just fine. To say that our people are not willing to work is a joke. Despite worms, syphilis, alcohol, drought and other ills, they work desperately and live despite eating rotten food, that’s clear. It’s natural that the new literature developing around here concerns itself with them. It is always more worthwhile than describing happy homes that don’t exist, or telling nonsensical stories, pretty things tidily conforming to the rules. The new contemporary writers go out and study the suburbs, the factories, the plantation, the rural prison, the school of hard knocks. For this they’ve decided to abandon the asphalt and cafés, seeing a lot of filth up close, they had the courage to speak incorrectly, like the people, without a dictionary, without a grammar book, without a style manual. They heard screams, calamities, sayings, and put everything into the books they were writing.]

The passage encapsulates the inspiration for the literary revolt. It also characterizes the bankers, speculators, merchants, businessmen and citydwellers as far removed from the quotidian reality of the Brazilian people, the belletrists as self-consciously concerned with what is fashionable in literary stylistics and timid in their approach. This is contrasted with the rugged individualism of the Regionalists who keep their ears open as they observe; who aspire to scientific objectivity by keeping their depictions non-judgmental; whose representations are purported to be unflinching. Ethnographic fieldwork and the emerging works on folklore, pan-Africanism, comparative religions, linguistics, sociology, psychology and comparative history provided rich sources for the experimentation with models of representation. In the search for what they perceived as
an authentic means of bringing out Brazil’s national character, historical figures and iconic types coexist freely.

In the Frontispiece of Rachel de Queiroz’s Lampião, the editor informs us that in the history surrounding Virgulino Ferreira’s life, facts and legend intermingle with indistinguishable ease in the oral and written traditions of the northeast, and that Rachel de Queiroz captures this fluid aspect of oraliture in her treatment of the cangaceiro’s life. In “Chapter V: The Struggle” of Amado’s The Violent Land, the author acknowledges the importance and longevity of the oral tradition in Brazil:

For this reason it has remained a living reality down the years, the stories concerning it passing from mouth to mouth, from the old men to the young. And at the fairs in the towns and cities blind musicians sing of the gun-frays which once upon a time drenched with blood the land of cacao…For the blind are the poets, and chroniclers of this country. They it is who, strumming on their guitars, keep alive with their wheedling voices the traditions of the region. And the crowd at the fairs…all gather around these blind bards to listen to stories of the time when cacao was in its infancy and the century likewise was young….but the hearers never think of associating the planters of today with the conquistadores of yesterday. It is as if the latter were beings of another world, so greatly have times changed (Amado, 1945).

The insistence on the blindness of these griots underscores the fact that they are not reading Brazil’s history, that the power of the spoken word transcends writing (and indeed precedes it). This history, kept alive by the act of vocalizing, forms part of the regional traditions largely ignored by the authors of fashionable texts which look to the future at the expense of the past and of the Brazilian people. And while the blind are able to “see” the continuity of the Brazilian experience and the effects of power from the time of the conquistadores to the present day, the seeing “hearers” are unable to make the
connection. As the saying goes, there are none so blind as those who will not see, or in this case hear. Amado provides an alternative model of history, a living, breathing history that differs in content and delivery from the static standard found in textbooks. Critic Josué de Castro observes this tendency among the regionalist novelists:

Josué de Castro: Saiu do nordeste resignada, a primeira fornada de verdadeiros romancistas brasileiros... Romancistas como José Lins do Rego... Jorge Amado... Jorge de Lima... José Américo [de Alameida]... Rachel de Queiroz... Armando Fontes... Graciliano Ramos... Esta gente tôda é chamada por certos críticas de sectária, de intencional num sentido pejorativo... não usam um cristal verde diante dos olhos... não confiaram muito na História do Brasil dos livros, foram ver mesmo como era, e escreveram... uma história do Brasil... (Amado 1961, 115-116).

[Out of the resigned Northeast came the first batch of truly Brazilian novelists… novelists such as José Lins do Rego… Jorge Amado… Jorge de Lima… José Américo [de Alameida]… Rachel de Queiroz… Armando Fontes… Graciliano Ramos… All of these people are called “interested” in the pejorative sense, by certain sectarian critics…[these writers] do not see things through rose-colored glasses… they mistrusted the History of Brazil written in books; they went out to see how it really was and wrote… a history of Brazil.]

The above citation, showing Castro’s differentiation of History and history highlights the distinction between official historical accounts that make it into textbooks, and the quotidian histories lived by the people on the ground. This perspective of a chasm between History writ large and that constructed by the everyday lives of individuals calls to mind the discourse of Caribbean literary theorists such as Edouard Glissant and Wilson Harris. As Castro points out, the alternate history written by these authors is subversive by nature and, just as the writers he cites are described as distrustful of the History that
they have encountered in other texts, so too is the content of their works called into question: “[they] are called ‘interested’ in the pejorative sense.”

If Emile Zola stands out as one of the spiritual fathers of that literature tied to the land and the people, the inspirational forebears of the Modernists were André Breton, Jean Cocteau and the Italian Futurists. The Modernists were also engaged in the quest for a new way of telling, of freeing the staticity of the written word, though their project has a different basis as we shall see in the following chapter on Mário de Andrade and René Depestre. The “slice-of-life” realism espoused by the Regionalists is of little interest to the Modernists, who show a marked tendency to deviate from rigidly constructed genres, preferring to experiment with a variety of literary styles and making use of ethnographic monographs, sociological studies, newspaper articles, poetry, song, oraliture, as models to emulate and insert into the body of the text just as their counterparts did, but to different ends. Their efforts are no less deliberate than those of the Regionalists as described above by Graciliano Ramos. Robert Morse attests to this, citing the Modernists themselves:

What was striking about the young modernistas was not, however, their insolence and iconoclasm but their self-consciousness and missionary dedication. This was reflected in their first literary review, which referred to the Semana as a medical necessity to remedy the sickly state of the arts: “Damp, chilled, rheumatic with a tradition of artistic tears, we made up our minds. Surgical operation. Excision of the lachrymal glands (Morse 435).

The malaise felt by the Modernist writers is shown to be no less acute than that felt by their Regionalist counterparts. Nor is the search for a new mode of expression any less urgent. As they see it, the sickly state of Brazilian literature is in dire need of an infusion.
In an analysis that looks at the inter-hemispheric cross-pollination of ideas, João Carneiro (citing Bastide) discusses the influence Négritude, a pan-Africanist discourse that emerged under the larger auspices of Modernism:

Roger Bastide considera que a Negritude também chegou ao Brasil: das mútuas influências entre modernistas e regionalistas resultou uma expressão nacional, que incorporou valores negros, indios e brancos, o mulatismo, uma identidade mestiça, uma originalidade cultural, uma variante brasileira da Negritude, florescendo na década de trinta (Carneiro 1981, 83).

[Roger Bastide believes that Negritude also arrived in Brazil: from the mutual influences between the modernists and the regionalists resulted a national expression which incorporated black, Indian and white values. Mulatismo, a mestizo identity, a cultural original, a Brazilian variant of Negritude, flourished in the thirties.]

The valorization of blackness articulated by Negritude worked in tandem with wider pan-Africanist developments in the social sciences and the arts: jazz, the Harlem Renaissance, the Revue Indigène. With this new-found appreciation of cultural symbols and with the revolt against French letters in general, Indigéniste novels are full of examples of what was considered corrupted French. Haitian Creole, unwritten for generations, posed problems of orthography for writers accustomed with French morphology. Auguste Viatte makes an observation on the linguistic situation: « Haïti, ne l’oublions pas, est bilingue : à côté du français très pur dont se sert l’élite, les classes populaires s’expriment en dialecte créole, que tous comprennent » [Let us not forget that Haiti is bilingual. Alongside the very pure French used by the elite, the masses express themselves in the Creole dialect understood by all] (Viatte 1162-1174). But the elite was the readership that the Indigenists aspired to reach, and one of their aims was certainly edifying those whom they viewed as alienated, seeking to reconcile the two societies.
Conscious of the problems that this unorthodox mix of French and Creole posed for their readers, writers such as Roumain and Cinéaste provide extratextual resources such as translations, glossaries, explicatory footnotes for their readers. After writing a sentence such as “La vie est un grignindents,” Roumain immediately provides a translation: (1) *La vie est un éclat de rire,* [Life is ringing laughter]. Cinéas includes a “Frenchified” spelling for a Haitian phrase in a Creole song of supplication: *Pardonné-li, Seigneur, pardonné-li. Ou oué bien, li cé yon povr innocent…* [“Forgive him Lord, forgive him. You can well see he is a poor innocent.”] The standard French orthography would be written: *Pardonnez-le, Seigneur, pardonnez-le. Vous pouvez bien voir qu’il est un pauvre innocent*] (Cinéas 58-59). Cinéas goes so far as to include sentences where his characters, in the throes of religious fervor, speak in tongues: *les esprits parlent langage : « Koma za tsawo-ya sidsim-gwira akala mu-ganga...Fan a yen mushol lu »* (Cinéas 46). For this he provides no translation, maintaining a measure of opacity in the world of the paysan.

The effort to maintain a veneer of authenticity in their attempts to transcribe one language according to the grammatical rules of another forced the Haitian Indigenists as well as the Brazilian Regionalists to take creative license with the French of the Académie Française and Iberian Portuguese respectively, in attempts to raise the denigrated local vernaculars to a respected variety of their European counterparts. As we shall see in the next chapter, the play with linguistic register, syntax and conventional uses of language is one of Brazilian icon Mário de Andrade’s trademarks.

The Modernists broke with generic conventions as well as with thematic tropes. The peasantry and descriptive passages of the countryside were of less interest to them as
subjects in and of themselves. Nor were they looking to counter one type (the city
dweller) with another (the country peasant). Such oppositions, although useful, were not
the primary focus of their endeavors. As we shall see with Depestre and Andrade, there is
a complexity which incorporates cultural, political, social and linguistic elements and
problematizes the attempts at neat categorizations that ethnographic inscription aspires to.
The Modernists (by and large) rejected the notion of synthesis on one level, and ruptures
are a prominent element in their works. The libertarian strain that embraces artistic
freedom in their works also infuses a central theme in the work of Depestre and Andrade,
that rather than being classified as segments of the population, the citizens of their
respective nations should be free to be.
Chapter III: Beyond Description: The Ethnographic Impulse in the Fiction of Mário de Andrade and René Depestre

All mythology, whether of the folk or of the literati, preserves the iconography of a spiritual adventure that men have been accomplishing repeatedly for millennia, and which, whenever it occurs, reveals such constant features that the innumerable mythologies of the world resemble each other as dialects of a single language.34

– Joseph Cambell

More than forty years separate the publication of Brazilian poet, essayist, novelist and ethnomusicologist Mário de Andrade’s *Macunaima* (1928) and Haitian poet, essayist, novelist, cultural critic René Depestre’s *Le Mât de cocagne* (1972). Though decades apart and thematically dissimilar, I have paired the two works (and the two writers) for what they bring to this discussion on autoethnography and the use of myth in literature as a means of exploring cultural representation. Unlike chapter two, which looks at the contemporaneous impact of autoethnographic writing on the development of the *Roman Indigéniste* and the *Romance Regionalista*, the focus here is on the mutually constitutive relationships between modernism, ethnography, political history, folklore and linguistics in the work of Mário de Andrade and René Depestre.

Andrade’s *Macunaima* is a text which, like the novels from the previous chapters, has its origins in Brazil’s northeast and as we shall see, is also deeply influenced by ethnology. Unlike the Regionalists who often proclaimed the peasant as an archetype of Brazilian identity, Andrade challenges any notion of essentialization in terms of what a typical Brazilian should be. Ethnography provides the writer with a means of exploring the array of cultural components of *brasilidade*.

34 John Cambell, preface (Deren 1983(1953), xi).
For his part, René Depestre challenges stereotypical representation, in his way contesting the conceptualization of the rural/urban dichotomy espoused by many Indigéniste writers. Although Depestre’s first novel debuts in 1972, his poetry dates back to the 1940s, making him a contemporary (albeit a young one) of the Indigenists and placing his writing career temporally closer to Andrade and the Brazilian Regionalists than the publication of the novel suggests. Furthermore, the choice of *Le Mât de cocagne* for this study is deliberate. In this novel, the author revisits the political appropriation of cultural symbols by the Noiristes, specifically the Duvalierists, who in taking over the State apparatus, exploited the very symbols that the Catholic Church and successive Haitian governments had attempted to control, as seen in the previous chapter.

Depestre seeks to denounce the mystification of the Duvalier regime by recoding *Vodu’s* social function. The manuscript of the novel, written while Depestre was in Cuba and published after the death of the senior Duvalier, has the benefit of the writer’s errancy and his extensive knowledge of both domestic and traditional ethnography. Depestre’s own meditations on the legacy and implications of Price-Mars’s ethnographic work and those of the “Brazilian School” of anthropology form part of his frame of reference.

The value of temporal distance provides insight into the evolution of ethnographic inscription from the days of Price-Mars and Ramos and its far-reaching influence beyond the decades of the 1920s and 1930s. The span of years also allows one to study the implications of the pan-Africanist project of the social scientists and writers as they evolved in the contexts of wider inter- and intra-hemispheric discourses across a number of disciplines. In addition, Depestre (who befriended Jorge Amado while in Europe),
traveled to and wrote while in Brazil, bringing a pertinent perspective of that country to this study’s comparative focus. His assessment of the legacy of the aims of that initial period is very valuable, particularly in light of his familiarity with the ethnographic writings emerging from Brazil as well as the work of that nation’s authors.

The distance between the two publication dates belies the closeness of the development of ideas that shape the work of Depestre and Andrade, their similar interests and common influences. Depestre’s novel revisits the debates between the Indigenists and the Modernists and the politics of cultural identity and nationalism discussed in chapter two. Poetry was at the forefront of the Indigéniste movement and to that extent, I have included a poem by Depestre written in Brazil early in his exile. The temporal distance with his novel is useful in a study of how the premises of autoethnography, articulated early in the 20th century, are manifested in the latter part of that century as opposed to at the start. The forty year lapse is of interest when considering the extent and reach of the influence of the social sciences, particularly ethnography, over the arts and letters of Brazil and Haiti.

Various elements in the texts invite comparison, both in terms of style and content. Neither work fits neatly into the classification of a particular genre. If, as Marcus and Cushman contend, “[g]enres are essentially literary institutions, or social contracts between a writer and a specific public, whose function is to specify the proper use of a cultural artifact,” then these texts are inherently subversive, challenging easy categorization and facile understandings of “proper use” (Marcus & Cushman 1982, 28). Both works exhibit a purposeful rebelliousness, leave behind all notions of “proper use” and defy convention. A mélange of styles is evident, as is a pervasive eroticism, subdued
perhaps only by a tangible didactic strain. As I will later illustrate, the texts shatter any
overt reader expectations, each work revealing itself in layers that allow for multiple
readings.

The relevance of ethnography to the literature of Depestre and Andrade can be
placed in the context of the following citation from Lourdes Teodoro: “Tandis que la
Négritude propose une synthèse autour de la race noire, le Modernisme propose
l’harmonie dans le conflit racial et culturel [While Negritude proposes a synthesis
around the Black race, Modernism proposes harmony in racial and cultural conflict…]
(Marcus & Cushman 1982, 28). It is in illustrating racial and cultural conflict that the two
writers find a unifying element in their respective works, inserting their texts into the
larger discourse of cultural identity. For Depestre and Andrade, harmony does not come
about by the undesirable endeavor of erasing difference (an erasure which can never truly
be achieved), but rather by embracing diversity.

Both writers address issues of race and class in their respective works, exploring
the way each interfaces with questions of self-definition and self-determination.
Andrade’s own conflicted relationship with his mulatto identity is an integral component
in Brazil’s seemingly benign, but ultimately contentious race relations. It is what makes
him question, in a letter to fellow Brazilian scholar and historian Paulo Duarte, Gilberto
Freyre’s vision of the nation’s “racial democracy”: “Basta dizer que o Gilberto
Freyre[sic], êsse decantado sociólogo G. Freire, não sabe nem o que é raça e fala em
raça brasileira ” [Suffice to say that Gilberto Freyre, this lauded sociologist G. Freyre,
doesn’t even know what race is and speaks of a Brazilian race] (P. Duarte, 1971, 244).
But Andrade avoids the trap of reductionism by not limiting his observations to class struggles, or matters of race. To appreciate the fullness of “Brazilianness” or *brasilidade* (cf. chapter two) in its multiple expressions, Andrade attempts to present a composite of the nation’s regional identities, social structures, modes of dress, musical varieties, mores, myths and religions. Because of this desire to forge a comprehensive and profound knowledge of Brazil’s cultural identity, Andrade vehemently resists Freyre’s assimilationist vision. In another letter to Duarte, Andrade writes:

*S. Paulo, 26-VI-41*

*Mas quando leio certas passagens do regionalismo organizado em sistema de inteligências de um Gilberto Freyre, que o leva até à desonestidade do espírito, me dou graças-a-Deus desta nossa maciça sensatez, ai! No fundo dá pena. Imagine um homem da altura e responsabilidade de G. Freyre escrevendo um artigo sobre pintura, como expressão da vida tradicional e caracterização regional, que várias vezes generaliza pró Brasil, pra cima do Brasil, o que diz do Nordeste, e esquece, e não quis citar Debret, Rugendas entre os estrangeiros, e Almeida Júnior entre os nacionais! É uma desonestidade que chega ao absurdo.*

...Mário.35

35 Clearly this disdain for Freyre’s statements is shared by Paulo Duarte. It would be interesting to pursue the basis of the positive reception of Freyre’s work outside of Brazil. Until the work of such scholars as American Historian and Latin Americanist G. Reid Andrews in the 1970’s, Freyre’s conceptualization of race relations in Brazil went largely unchallenged outside of Brazil. Below is the equally dismissive response of Duarte to Andrade.

*Laramie, 17.8.41*

*Meu querido Mário:*

*Sua carta com aquéles clamores contra a desonestidade mental do Gilberto Freire chegou aqui justamente quando eu passava pela mesma crise de revolta contra o mesmíssimo brilhante literato...o “sociólogo”, como cientista que deve ser, em vez de analisar problemas sociais para chegar a determinada conclusão de acôrdo desses problemas, escolheu primeiro uma conclusão; agradar Portugal – e tratou depois de adaptar os seus estudos a fim de que pudessem chegar à conclusão. O resultado é que o sociólogo nordestino mais uma vez deixou completamente de ser sociólogo para continuar a ser o que sempre foi: um excelente literato, com atraente estilo, muita imaginação, a esborrachar-se tôdas as vezes em que pretenda sair fôra da literatura.* [200]

[Laramie, 8/17/41]

My Dear Mário,
[But when I read certain passages of the regionalism organized as a system of research by one Gilberto Freyre, which rises to the level of dishonesty of spirit, I thank God for our massive prudence...ay! In truth it inspires pity. Imagine a man of the stature and responsibility of G. Freyre writing an article on painting, as an expression of traditional and characteristic regional life, which various times is generalized for Brazil, for all of Brazil...what he says is of the Northeast, and researches while choosing not to cite Debret, Rugendas among the foreigners, and Almeida Júnior among the nationals is a dishonesty that reaches the level of absurdity! ... Mário]

Like Ramos, Andrade feels an impetus to set the record straight, to present a more holistic picture of Brazilian culture. It is a counter-argument to Amado’s view of the colonization of the North by the South. Andrade is decrying a view of Brazil that takes the North as representative of the nation, resisting the regional model of the nordeste.

Your letter clamoring against the intellectual dishonesty of Gilberto Freire [sic] arrived here just when I was going through the same crisis of revolt against the same brilliant writer...the “sociologist”, as the scientist that he should be, instead of analyzing social problems in order to arrive at a solution appropriate to these problems, chose a conclusion first to please Portugal – and tried afterwards to adapt his studies with the aim of arriving at that conclusion. The result is that the Northeastern sociologist, more than once, stopped being a sociologist completely in order to remain what he always was: an excellent writer, with an attractive style, much imagination, stumbling each time he attempts to step out of literature.]

[Of course, within Brazil, Freyre had his supporters among the Regionalists, as we have seen and critics such as Wilson Martins, author/editor of A literatura brasileira: Vol. VI : O Modernismo (1916-1945), who writes: Casa Grande & Senzala foi lido por seu conteúdo de ciência, mas também, por sua forma literária e, embora alguns críticos de má fé ou de curta inteligência tenham visto nessa duplicidade um motivo de censura, a verdade é que as duas coisas se completam no plano superior em que se situam as obras-primas. Casa Grande and Senzala was read for its scientific content, but also for its literary form and although some critics of bad faith or of limited intelligence saw in this duality a motive for criticism, the truth is that the two things complement each other in the higher plane in which masterworks are found.]

[198]. We can see how the polemical debates between the Modernists and the Regionalists stirred up conflicting views regarding Freyre’s contribution to Brazil’s cultural identity. Jorge Amado values Freyre’s work for its insights on Brazilian identity: « J’estime que Gilberto Freyre a joué un très grand rôle, car Casa Grande e Senzala est réellement le livre brésilien qui nous conte le plus de choses sur notre identité, sur la formation de la nation brésilienne et la manière dont elle s’est opérée. » [I consider that Gilberto Freyre played a significant role since Masters and Servants is really the Brazilian book which informs us the most about our identity, on the formation of the Brazilian nation and the manner in which it came about.] Jorge Amado : Conversations avec Alice Raillard [82].
even while, paradoxically, it is in the northeast that Andrade finds the inspiration for
Macunaima. As a person of mixed heritage, and a member of the elite, Andrade’s
understanding of the realities of Brazil’s societal realities make him sensitive to the
subtleties of rapport between rich and poor, between black and white.

For the well-traveled Depestre, issues of race relations also weigh heavily, within
Haitian culture, as well as in inter-hemispheric relations. Depestre reads and writes
extensively about the works of other regional scholars, the subjects of their texts making
up a large amount of the content of his essays: “Certains savants – surtout Ortiz, Price-
Mars, Arthur Ramos, Alfred Métraux, Roger Bastide, Edison Carneiro, Aquiles
Escalante, M. Acosta Saignes, Frazier, M. Leiris, G. Aguirre Beltram, Herskovits, parmi
ceux qui permettront à une anthropologie scientifique, débarrassée de tout
ethnocentrisme, d’identifier correctement nos peuples dans l’histoire des sociétés
nationales qu’ils ont constituées dans l’hémisphère occidental... [Certain scholars –
especially Ortiz, Price-Mars, Arthur Ramos, Alfred Métraux, Roger Bastide, Edison
Carneiro, Aquiles Escalante, M. Acosta Saignes, Frazier, M. Leiris, G. Aguirre Beltram,
Herskovits, [are] among those who will allow a scientific anthropology, bereft of all
ethnocentrism, to correctly identify our peoples in the history of national societies that
they have constituted in the Western hemisphere] (Depestre 1988, 88).

The interest in ethnology for both Depestre and Andrade would be incomplete
without a reportage on interracial interactions (although this is but one aspect in the
multi-faceted works), without an examination of perceptions at the personal, local,
national and international levels. The understanding of the impact of race and class on
culture, coupled with the tenets and premises of Modernism and the evolution of
ethnographic methodology, promotes an element of rebellion in their work. The influence of Marxism is subtly evident in Andrade’s work, more obviously so in the work of Depestre. The Haitian writer looks to it as a means of escaping the radicalization of Negritude as he observes it in the noiriste doctrine of Haitian dictator François Duvalier.

Depestre’s merging of these two discourses leads to what Haitian scholar Claude Souffrant calls a “counter-Negritude”: “La contre-Négritude de Depestre est nuancée. Il fait une distinction entre une Négritude réactionnaire et une Négritude progressiste. La progressiste, il souhaite la voir entrer en conjonction avec le marxisme pour irriguer le mouvement ouvrier et paysan et faire lever la Révolution…” [The counter-Negritude of Depestre is nuanced. He makes a distinction between a reactionary Negritude and a progressive Negritude. The progressive one, he hopes to see enter into conjunction with Marxism in order to irrigate the worker’s and peasant’s movement and to instigate the Revolution] (Souffrant 383).

The connection of Mário de Andrade’s work to Marxist views is an argument that critic Marta Morais da Costa makes in her article “Um Poeta Verdadeiro Conta Seu Sonho; Teatro e Revolução em Café de Mário de Andrade”... [A True Poet tells his Dream; Theater and Revolution in Mário de Andrade’s Café]. Although I do not discuss the play here, the article provides clear insight into Andrade’s awareness of the political possibilities of art. It clearly places him within the company of a fellow “artiste engagé” such as Depestre, and the two of them alongside many of the Indigenistes and Regionalists such as Roumain and Amado. Da Costa writes: Mário de Andrade (...) vê o teatro não como um processo de descrição e análise, mas como a mais independente e mais social das artes, capaz de nacionalizar, socializar, conduzir atitudes éticas para a
humanidade (Morais da Costa 119). A partir de um momento determinado da história –
do Brasil – a crise do café de 1929/30 – Mário de Andrade procurou exemplificar
_dramaturgicamente o conceito de revolução. O ponto de partida foi a situação difícil
vivida pelos plantadores e produtores de café, economicamente considerado uma fonte
de divisas para a nação [Mário de Andrade...sees the theater not as a descriptive or
analytical process, but as the most independent and most social of the arts, capable of
nationalizing, socializing, driving ethical attitudes for humanity. Beginning with a
specific moment in history – Brazil’s history – the coffee crisis of 1929/30 – Mário de
Andrade succeeded to dramatically exemplify the concept of revolution. The poing of
departure was the difficult situation lived by the planters and producers of coffee,
economically considered a source of division for the nation] (Morais da Costa 120). And
just as the content of the work of these two writers promotes revolution in the form of
characters who challenge the status quo, their stylistic experimentations revolutionize the
constitution of accepted literary rules.

The worldview of the two writers is a further justification for reading their work
comparatively, despite the gap in temporality. Their combined output is useful in a study
such as the one I undertake, allowing one to investigate the nexus of the dominant ideas
of the 20th century and how they colored the conceptualizations of the two authors, in
turn influencing their experiments in modes of narration and representation. It is also
informative in attempting to understand the processes involved in the reformulation of
metaphoric inscription of symbolism, since one is able to compare these texts to those of
the Indigenists and Regionalists.
A member of what is known as the Brazilian vanguard, and a contemporary of Arthur Ramos, Mário de Andrade is an early practitioner of autoethnography, attempting to analyze all of the disparate elements of Brazil’s social make-up in the search for a national character. One of the foremost intellectuals of his time, born in 1893 in São Paulo, Andrade trained in piano, musicology and the liberal arts and was at one time the director of the Municipal Department of Culture, formed in 1935. He was removed from his post one year later because his vision of the Department did not coincide with that of the Vargas regime. Mário de Andrade’s first publication at the age of twenty-four, appears in 1917. The collection is entitled Há uma gota de sangue em cada poema, [There is a Drop of Blood in Every Poem], a title which resonates with the Regionalists’s sanguine preoccupations.

Through his writings, we are made aware of the malaise the Brazilian writer experiences with respect to the impact of European culture on Brazil: “Mário had learned that the importation of foreign cultures and traditions had depersonalized the Brazilian to such a degree that he once even questioned whether he himself was a Brazilian” (Suárez & Tomlins 10). The gulf between the elite and the general population was widened by the education of the former, which was based on European ideals and culture. This alienation informs the subtitle of Macunaima: the Hero without any Character. It is through the adventures of the protagonist that the writer embarks on a quest precisely to find what his hero lacks (yet in his varied manifestations and through his experiences ultimately represents): the cultural identity of the Brazilian in all of its multiplicity.
Mário de Andrade’s *Macunaima*, an amalgam of indigenous mythology, Futurist ideals, linguistic experimentation, ethnographic observation as well as a collection of folklore tinged with parody and wit, challenges easy categorization. The work is widely referred to as a rhapsody, a designation which acknowledges the weaving-together of the disparate elements that make up its form and the effusiveness of its language. In terms of plot, it is a rather simple story: it begins with the birth of Macunaima, a member of the Tapanhuma indigenous community, and follows his misadventures as a young man who eventually sets out on a quest to recuperate a talisman stolen from him. Through his travels, Macunaima undergoes several metamorphoses, is killed and resurrected, comes into contact with fantastic beings, gods, monsters, and eventually the residents of São Paulo, a source of particular fascination for the protagonist. Upon his death Macunaima becomes a constellation, in this way achieving a symbolic immortality.

The elusive nature of the work impedes generic classification and reinforces Mário de Andrade’s notion of Brazilian identity as irreductible. By mixing genres, legend with history, ethnography with stereotype, mythology and religion, Andrade is gesturing toward the New World phenomena of hybridization and creolization. The figure of Macunaima, shifting, questing, questioning, observing, concluding, is a stand-in for

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36 All English translations are from the Random House 1984 edition by E. A. Goodland; the Portuguese text used is the 1996 critical edition published by Allca XX edited by Telê Porto Ancona Lopez.

37 José Suárez and Jack E. Tomlins, in Mário de Andrade: the Creative Works define the work as: “a rhapsody...a narrative in poetic prose, structured on the basis of the narrative of the popular singer...the popular singer of course modeled on the ancient Greek rhapsodist who often pieced together fragments of preceding tales or epics: precisely Mário de Andrade’s *modus operandi* here” [97]. Though Suárez and Tomlins insist upon the Greek rhapsodist as a source, could not the African Griot work just as easily as a model? David Nicholls, in “Ideology and Political Protest in Haiti, 1930-1946.” *Journal of Contemporary History* vol. 9, No. 4 (Oct., 1974) 3-26 [5] describes the Griot as “the poet, the story-teller, the magician of the tribe, who perpetuates tribal customs and beliefs.” In appropriating and expanding upon indigenous, African, European, and invented folklore and mythology, and melding these together, Andrade is perpetuating a new set of customs and beliefs unique to Brazil.
Andrade himself, who in the dual role of observer and native informant engages in an interrogation of the meaning of “Order and Progress” and racial identity (cf. p 36). The shifts in temporality, genre, geography and narrative voice are seamless. Literary scholar Maria Teresa de Freitas describes the “rhapsody” in the following manner:

*Macounaïma est une sorte de fable fantastique, qui dépasse toute conception rationnelle du temps et de l’espace, ainsi que toute ambition réaliste ; mais aux éléments de l’univers fantastique se mêlent ceux du quotidien sans aucune transition, sans précaution dans la recontextualisation. Et surcroît, écrit dans une perspective « anthropophagique », le texte est construit par imbrication d’une infinité de textes préexistants, qui contiennent pour la plupart des mythes et des légendes indigènes, puisés dans les régions les plus variées du pays en un effort d’unification par « dégéographisation. »* (De Freitas 230).

*[Macunaíma is a sort of fantastic fable which goes beyond all rational concept of time and space, as well as all realist ambition; but with the elements of the fantastic universe are mixed those of the everyday without any transition, without care in the recontextualization. In addition, written in an “anthropophagical” perspective, the text is constructed with an infinite interweaving of preexisting texts that contain for the most part, indigenous myths and legends, drawn from the most varied regions of the country in an effort at unification by “de-geographization.”]*

It is, to say the least, an ambitious and immensely rich text, of interest not only for its narrative content, but also for the virtuosity of its style.

In the first decades of the twentieth century, the emergence of the study of folklore, championed by autoethnographers as a means to self-knowledge is seized upon by writers as well. In the case of Mário de Andrade, folklore becomes essential to the “Brazilianization” of Brazil; that is, not merely a political evolution from a colony to a nation, but a cultural movement as well. Lourdes Teodoro states « Mário reconnaît le
besoin non seulement de connaître le folklore mais d’en approfondir la connaissance »

Mario recognizes the need to deepen the knowledge of the folklore of Brazil, not merely to know it] (Lourdes Teodoro 134). By appropriating a figure from indigenous mythology and utilizing him as a symbol of cultures in contact, Andrade endeavors to reveal Brazil to itself in all of its multifaceted complexity. Issues of language, race and regionalism are addressed with parodic humor, wry burlesque and sobering interrogations.

One aspect of the text, the insistent valorization of Brazilian Portuguese vis-à-vis the continental variety, is at the fore of the Modernist project : « Le Modernisme manifeste bien ainsi son vrai caractère : il est l’expression de la révolte d’une littérature contre le Portugal, et derrière lui, contre tout l’Occident, une espèce de décolonisation de l’intelligence et de la sensibilité brésilienne » [In this way Modernism manifests its true character well: it is the expression of the revolt of a literature against Portugal, and beyond that, against the entire West, a sort of decolonization of the Brazilian mind and sensibility] (Bastide 542). In such a vast nation, regionalisms reveal the notion of one “standard” language to be a fallacy. In making the case for Brazilian Portuguese, Mário de Andrade was not attempting to privilege one regional variety, but rather reveling in the richness of the spoken vernacular, encouraged by the possibilities of stretching the written form:

[Mário de Andrade] n’a pas voulu comme le prétendaient ses détracteurs créer « la langue nationale » mais démontrer que la langue culte d’un pays ne pouvait être que la somme des parlers régionaux familiers jargons urbains et ruraux dont l’élite refusait l’apport. En affirmant écrire le brésilien, observe-t-il, il n’y a pas une phrase qu’elle écrive qui ne puisse être signée par un
Lusitanien avec l’intégrité nationale...lusitanienne (Bastide).

[Mário de Andrade did not want, as his detractors determined, to create a « national language », but to demonstrate that the cultivated language of a country could only be the sum of regionalisms, common urban and rural jargon, the contribution of which the elite refused to acknowledge. In affirming to write in Brazilian, he observes, there is not a phrase written in it that could not be signed by a Lusitanian with Lusitanian national integrity.]

By playing upon the word “Lusitanian,” Bastide is showing that both varieties of Portuguese (Brazilian and that of Portugal) are on equal footing, that it is an error to privilege the one based on touted legitimate usage in urban centers while denigrating the rural vernaculars coded as “illegitimate” by so-called purists. Language and society are at the core of Macunaíma and Andrade highlights the debates surrounding usage.

Language, for example, is an object of study as well as a mode of conveyance. Perhaps the most relevant chapter of the text for the purposes of this study is Chapter IX: “Letter to the Amazons.” Here, the protagonist, Macunaíma, shifts into the role of narrator (taking over for his omniscient predecessor) and social observer. It is in this chapter that Macunaíma’s voice as cultural anthropologist is most pronounced. The epistolary form of the chapter provides the protagonist with an opportunity for a first-person account where he expresses himself directly to the intended readers, the Amazons, and by extension, to the implied reader.

Through the contents of this letter, Macunaíma reveals himself as cultural critic, etymologist, historian, ethnographer, weaving a tapestry of mythology, folklore, legend, history, parody and burlesque. The letter is particularly interesting for several reasons,
one of which is the contrast that it draws between the city of São Paulo and the northern region from which Macunaima hails. Forced to leave his home in the tropical expanse of Brazil’s Amazonia, Macunaima and his brothers have made their way to the southeastern city, Brazil’s industrial center. As presented through the eyes of the young and astonishingly erudite Tapanhuman hero, the city is a marvel and Macunaima makes a detailed assessment of it that he conveys to the Amazons:

São Paulo is built on seven hills, the traditional feature of Rome, city of the Caesars, Capital of Latinity, from which we sprang; their feet are kissed by the slender and restless nymph of the river Tietê (Macunaima 74).

The point of reference for comparison is Rome, the link being established not only with the topography, but through a perceived continuity with Latinity “from which we sprang.” São Paulo is thus elevated to the status of rival of other European cities, it is “equable”, it “matches them”, it is “magnificent,” as it, no less than the others, can claim filial lineage to the “city of the Caesars.” There is no mention of Portugal here, no lingering sentiment of inferiority often associated with Brazil’s former status as a colony. Rather, São Paulo is enviable for its beauty, despite its restricted access.

The urban landscape is presented in contradistinction to the lushness of the north: “The brothers had entered a broad savanna, which seemed at first sight to be dotted with clusters of tall palms...all bearing a plume of smoke instead of fronds” (Macunaima 33). The “plumes of smoke” are a testament to São Paulo’s growing importance as an industrial hub, a modern city. Despite the awe that Macunaima expresses upon seeing the magnificent city, there is a measure of ambivalence as to the signification of progress with its apparent deification of the machine and its subjugation of workers:
The Paulistas live in lofty palaces fifty or a hundred or more stories high… in the wretched shantytowns an uncountable multitude of bawling offspring is born each year; they are called “Little Italians” and are destined to become factory fodder in the manufactories owned by the opulent potentates and to serve as slaves when these Croesuses spend their time in aromatic relaxation. These and other multimillionaires have built twelve thousand silk factories, all around the city; and in odd corners can be found the most celebrated coffeehouses in the world, decorated with fine examples of the craft of carved jacaranda wood, gilded and inlaid with tortoise shell. The Palace of the Government is all of gold in the manner of the Queen of the Adriatic; and in a silver carriage upholstered in the finest skins, the President, who keeps many wives, takes the air as dusk falls, beaming benevolently. If it would not further delay the dispatch of this epistolary communication, Amazon ladies, we could describe many other things to you (Macunaíma).

The fascination with the city’s wealth is evident in these depictions of ostentatious displays of excess. These city dwellers live in “lofty palaces,” as does the womanizing president; they are referred to as “Croesuses” (a further display of Macunaíma’s familiarity with Greco-Roman mythology). The wealth generated by the factories of the industrialists is spent in the most lavish manner on opulent and extravagant items: silk, carved wood with tortoise-shell inlay, a silver carriage, fur. The beauty and wealth cannot serve to hide the hideous disparity between the rich and the immigrant poor, disparagingly and indiscriminately referred to as the “Little Italians” who reside in shantytowns, who serve the “potentates” as slaves. São Paulo’s riches, due in part to the pre-crash of 1929 boom in coffee exports is a powerful draw for immigrants from Europe, Japan and neighboring Latin American countries. The necessity to keep the peace in a city with such glaring inequalities requires a force for maintaining order, a fact that does not escape Macunaíma’s keen observation:
São Paulo is endowed with many burly and pugnacious policemen, who live in expensive, splendid white palaces. These cops strive to balance the excess of public wealth so as not to devalue the uncountable gold of the Nation; they apply such diligence in this effort that at every opportunity they squander the Nation’s money, be it for parades and glittering uniforms, be it for gymnastics… be it finally in hounding those incautious townsfolk leaving the movie or theater, or taking a spin in their automobile by way of the delightful gardens surrounding the capital. These police officers also compete in entertaining the young parlor maids and waitresses of São Paulo, and let it be said to their credit that they apply themselves to this diurnal task with unflagging zeal in the parks, constructed “ad hoc” such as the Pedro II Park and the Garden of Light. When the payroll of these Police becomes too great, the men are sent to remote and less fertile parts of the country where they are devoured by the tribes of anthropophagous giants that infest the geographical extent of our native heath, in the inglorious task of bringing to the ground honest governments; this with the approval and consent of the population in general, which is absolved from blame by the operations of the ballot box and governmental divertissement. These troublemakers capture the policemen, roast them and eat them in the German style; and their bones, falling onto the barren soil, become excellent fertilizers for the coffee groves of the future (*Macunaima* 75).

The combative and heavy-handed policemen who hound the “incautious townsfolk” are evidently corrupt, described in subtly unflattering terms. The wasteful spending and ostentation is a deliberate flaunting of wealth and power. The complete lack of decorum and sense of propriety is particularly unseemly in light of the widespread poverty and illness described in the letter. The diligence of the forces of order in spending for frivolous expenditures and acquiring personal gain rather than working for the profit of the Nation is antithetical to what the Tapanhuman feels should be their primary function. Anthropophagy appears as a convenient method of control, but rather than the indigenous phenomenon (which Oswald de Andrade reconceptualized into an artistic endeavor), the
link is made to Europe: “roast them and eat them in the German style.” In Rabelaisian fashion, giants walk the earth and are a dangerous presence. In *Macunaima* the world outside of the city is a perilous place. But the city is fraught with its own set of dangers and traps, despite it luxurious veneer.

And so it is with a measure of sarcasm, of tongue-in-cheek ambivalence that Macunaima goes on to state: “Thus, the well-organized Paulistas thrive and prosper in the most perfect ‘Order and Progress’” (*Macunaima* 76). In a system where corruption is allowed to flourish, “order” takes on a highly subjective and counterintuitive meaning. The contentious relationship to progress can be summed up in a very profound phrase contemplated by Macunaima, a conclusion upon which he arrives: “The Machine killed men, yet it was men who commanded the Machine” (*Macunaima* 35). Progress becomes a matter of perception, leading the protagonist to conclude: “In brief, we are again becoming a colony...of England or of North America” (*Macunaima* 76). There is an element of caution here, a warning that Brazil would do well not to substitute one colonial power for a new, “modern” one.

The content of the Letter to the Amazons centers upon one of Mário de Andrade’s most fervent preoccupations, the question of language. In a (post)colonial context, the act of naming has been a problematic gesture, a move fraught with the implications of power and conquest. The beleaguered peoples on the receiving end of sociopolitical domination have had to submit to designations chosen by the colonizers. Macunaima begins his rather long address with the question of naming in the address to the Amazon Ladies:

> It is quite true that in this pulchritudinous city of São Paulo – the greatest in the universe, so say its prolix inhabitants – you are not known as “Icambiabas” (considered here a barbarism) but rather by the appellation of “Amazons”; and
that you are, it is asseverated, belligerent and strong and riding on jennets, in the tradition of classical Hellas; so that is what you are denominated. Greatly though such extravagances of erudition grieve us, your Emperor, nevertheless you must agree with us that in this way you are apt to dwell in the mind as more heroic and more conspicuous, embellished by this respectable platina [sic] of antique purity.

Here, the chauvinism whereby one without knowledge of a given culture is nevertheless in a position to dictate the cultural identity of peoples encountered is merely a microcosm of the entire colonial enterprise, where all of the indigenous peoples of the New World were stripped of their mutual distinctions and lumped together under the erroneous moniker “Indian.” Furthermore, as our narrator recounts, their history is recast as belonging to the Hellenistic tradition, compounding this erasure of identity.

This time it is the Icambiabas who undergo a cultural change of identity, where-in their very name is disdained as a symbol of “barbarism.” The physical and temporal

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[In the Brazilian context, the question of the name, may be problematic especially for the Blacks who, via another modernism, want to adopt names (first names especially) of African origin; they see their aspirations circumvented by the responsible entities who would show them lists with Euro-American sounding names. In the past, numerous Brazilians (Black, White, mixed race) adopted Amerindian names to (mark) their nationalism, especially since the time of independence in 1822. One must also recall that the religious affiliation with the Orishás in Candomblé allow the initiate a symbolic and efficient encounter with his or her African ancestors. The practitioners of Candomblé often keep their civil name and their religious name. The Indians of Brazil have either adopted the European names they were baptized with, or have kept their own, and they may also additionally have a religious name. In the novel Macunaíma, the ethnic name of the “Icamiabas” will be replaced by Amazons in the language of the Paulistas.]
remove relegates the indigenous tribes to the absence of the forest, away from “civilization” and encases them in a remote past, where they become artifacts with the “patina” of archaism. Their antiquity is symbolic, as they are envisioned as static beings that time has forgotten, remaining outside the domain of civilization, antithetical to the aspirations of “Order and Progress.” This notion of non-Western peoples as somehow being outside of a progressive notion of time has been a long-standing anthropological convention contested by Johannes Fabian who identifies it as a “politics of time” in his study on anthropology and temporality (Fabian 1983). Language and the passage of time is also a concern for Andrade’s hero, and he engages in a long discussion of the orthography of the Tapanhuma word for amulet:

For one beautiful night in the ides of May in the year that has gone, we lost your amulet, known to you as a muiraquitã, otherwise spelled muraquitã, and by some knowledgeable pedants suspicious of unorthodox etymology written as muyrakitan, or even muraquéitã. Laugh not! You should know that this word, as familiar to you as are the Eustachian tubes of your own conchas, is almost unheard of here. For in this very civilized society, the warriors call themselves police, traffic cops, civic guards, boxers, sea lawyers, rabblerousers, and so on – these being some of the terms which are absurd neologisms; execrable trash with which the slovenly and vulgar set defiles the good Lusitanian tongue. But let us not wander from the point of discoursing sub tegmine fagi on the Portuguese language, otherwise called the Lusitanian. […] Thus, the very word muiraquitã, which offends the Latin ears of your Emperor, is unknown to the warriors here and to everyone in general who draws breath in this region. Scarcely any “citizens of importance in morals and letters,” as they are called by the good old classical friar Luís de Souza, cited by Dr. Rui Barbosa, have deigned to bestow their illuminating glances on muiraquitãs except to appraise them as being of inferior worth, originating in Asia and not from your fingers, worn to the bone from polishing them (Macunaima 68).
With no small measure of irreverence, Macunaíma pokes fun at those whom he derisively dubs pedants even as he injects his letter with Latin terms. The lack of consensus on the orthography of the word *muiraquitã* is made more acute by the injection of the notion of suspicion. There is an element of elitism associated with linguistic preference, suggesting that the perceived degradation of the language is based on class prejudice rather than true scholarship. The passage would have us see that the true corruption of the language is the fault of the city-dwellers, the “civilized” set who, even while ignorant of a common word in the Indigenous lexicon, never cease to invent “absurd neologisms; execrable trash with which the slovenly and vulgar set defiles the good Lusitanian tongue.” It is a reversal of the tendency to privilege the vernacular spoken in the cosmopolitan centers over the other regional and rural varieties. The exhortation “Laugh not!” demonstrates the keen awareness Macunaíma has for the absurdity regarding the insistence of an orthodoxy that ignores the fact that as long as a language remains a living entity, it will prove elastic, accommodating innovation and evolution. A static language is a dead language.

With respect to Mário de Andrade’s linguistic endeavors French scholar Roger Bastide states:

*Mario de Andrade est parti de cette constatation qu’il existe en fait deux langues au Brésil, une langue érudite, celle des écrivains, mais qui n’est pas comprise par le peuple, l’autre, une langue populaire, vivante certes, mais dédaignée. La langue érudite reste, qu’on le veuille ou non, portugaise ; on peut l’enrichir de vocables indigènes, on ne touche pas à son essence. L’autre est entièrement, et dans sa syntaxe, c’est-à-dire dans ce qu’elle a de plus fondamental, plus que dans son vocabulaire, différente du portugais « du Royaume ». La tâche que se donnera Mario de Andrade sera de faire passer la langue vulgaire du statut de langue parlée à celui de langue écrite. Mais il se heurterait à un obstacle : il n’y a pas qu’une langue vulgaire au Brésil ; les Indiens civilisés de l’Amazone ne parlent pas*
Mário de Andrade began with the fact that there are in reality two languages in Brazil, one an erudite language, that of writers, but that is not understood by the people, the other a popular language, alive certainly, but disdained. The erudite language remains, whether one wants it or not, Portuguese; one can enrich it with indigenous words but not touch its essence. The other is entirely (in its syntax, that is to say what is most fundamental to it, more so that in its vocabulary) different from the Portuguese of “the Crown”. The effort that Mário de Andrade undertakes for himself is to take the popular spoken language and transform it into a written language. But he’d run into an obstacle: there is more than one spoken language in Brazil; the civilized Indians of the Amazons do not speak like the “hispanicized” gauchos of the Rio Grande do Sur; the caboclos of the Interior, who have remained isolated from trade regions and contact with the exterior, maintain an archaic, almost medieval Portuguese, while the Brazilians from the large cities, which have been migratory zones for Europeans, have deformed the language of their host country and speak an Italian or German inflected Portuguese. The error of the “realists” was to copy these different languages; in so doing, they could valorize “dialects”; they did not create a Brazilian language. Mário de Andrade refuses to be fenced into the realm of expression, that of a certain sociological milieu, regional or rural. He wants to manipulate, fashion, make Brazilian literature give birth to an entirely new language.]
Bastide highlights the fact that the two modes of expression (literary and oral) of Brazil are largely mutually exclusive at the time that Andrade is writing, and that the oral language is infused with a variety of elements. Furthermore, he points to the disdain that exists for the popular language of the masses. *Macunaima* combines the loftiest and most vulgar expressions of Brazilian Portuguese, highlights this dispute over the attempted control over language, the efforts to contain it, to convert it into a type of currency which would paradoxically curtail its richness.

Of course in 1920’s Brazil, language is not the only currency on the market. With the project of “*branqueamento*” being vigorously pursued throughout Latin America, lighter skin is a marked asset. In dealing with race, Andrade provides us with an originary myth, whereby the black-Indian Macunaima and his brothers each come to be of a different “race”, each going through a process of transformation that explains varying degrees of skin color:

But this water was magic water, for the hollow was St. Thomas’ footprint, a relic from the time when he went around preaching and bringing the teachings of Jesus to the Indians of Brazil. When the hero [Macunaima] had finished his bath he was white-skinned, blue-eyed and fair-haired; the holy water had washed all his blackness; there was nothing left to show in any way that he was a son of the black tribe of Tapanhumas. As soon as Jiguê saw this miracle he sprang into St. Thomas’ footprint. But by this time the water was very dirty from the hero’s ivory blackness, so although Jiguê mopped himself like mad, splashing the water in all directions, he was left the color of freshly minted bronze. Macunaima was bothered by this and to comfort him said, “Look, brother Jiguê, you didn’t become white, but at least the blackness has gone away. Half a loaf is better than no bread!” Then Maanape went to wash, but Jiguê had splashed all the water out of the pool. There was only a cupful left at the bottom, so that Maanape
could wet only the palms of his hands and the soles of his feet. That’s why he remained black like a good son of the Tapanhuma tribe with only the palms of his hands and the soles of his feet pink after their washing in holy water. This grieved Macunaima, who consoled him by saying, “Don’t be vexed, brother Maanape, don’t let it get you down! Worse things happen at sea!” (Macunaima, 31-32).

The magical powers of the holy water, vestige of missionary conversions in the region, wash away the oxymoron of Macunaima’s “ivory blackness.” This is not, however, the only transformation. As in the course of Renaissance representations of Christ over which he becomes increasingly fair, Macunaima’s eyes and hair also become part of a ritualized, idealized image. Jiguê’s skin tone of “newly minted bronze” is symbolic of race-mixing; though considered a disappointment it is viewed as a minor blessing, but a blessing nonetheless.

Andrade makes use of all of the debates circulating throughout Brazil in the text of Macunaima, including those concerning the question of religion. In Brazil (as in Haiti, c.f. chapter two), the Catholic Church engaged in anti-superstition campaigns as a means of challenging what it perceived was a subversive resistance to its authority. In partnership with the respective governments of the two nations, attempts at curtailing Macumba and Candomblé in Brazil (and Vodu in Haiti), were two-pronged and heavy-handed. One can interpret the inclusion of a Macumba rite in Macunaima as both an attempt to represent Brazilian culture using all of its components in a gesture toward “authenticity” and “scientific” accuracy, as well as an act of defiance, a refusal to hide an aspect of the society that the establishment frowns upon and attempts to eradicate.

During his travels, one of the activities that Macunaima engages in is a Macumba ceremony. Andrade goes into a good deal of detail, including the chanting of the names
of the gods that are invoked. By noting the participation of such historical figures as Blaise Cendrars, Andrade is sanctioning the religion as a legitimate expression of faith from which Brazil should not attempt to extricate itself. What Andrade achieves is a sort of *bricolage*, a cultural tapestry that incorporates all of the disparate elements that make up Brazilian society. It is a work of ethnography, in so much as it relies on observation, more accurately so considering Andrade’s fieldwork in Amazônia the year prior to the publication of *Macunaíma*: Andrade’s field experiences and Futurist experiments help inspire the author’s particular blend of ethnography and fiction. Jean-Marc Moura summarizes the early results of Andrade’s excursions into Northeastern Brazil:

"...stratégie de réhabilitation du familier, qui se détourne de l’‘exotisme’ à la fois recherché et tué par le touriste, peut revêtir les aspects d’un manifeste littéraire. Tel est le cas du livre de Mario de Andrade, O Turista Aprendiz. A la fin des années vingt, les voyages de l’écrivain brésilien pauliste vers le Nordeste et l’Amazonie ont pour but de redécouvrir sa propre culture, d’apprendre les traditions, les légendes, les mœurs de son immense pays. Après avoir déchiré un exemplaire d’Os Lusiades pour marquer leur refus de la tradition d’Europe, après avoir proclamé leur dégoût de l’influence européenne et particulièrement française, les modernistes brésiliens, Andrade en tête, voulaient créer leur propre civilisation, un tropicalisme culturel et littéraire exclusivement brésilien. D’où cette tentative d’auto-ethnographie qui constitue ce qu’on pourrait appeler un anti-tourisme mû par le désir du ressourcement à domicile (Moura 2000, 277)."

[[A]strategy of rehabilitation of the familiar, which deviates from the exoticism at once sought and killed by the tourist, can redress the aspects of a literary manifesto. Such is the case of Mário de Andrade’s book *O Turista Aprendiz* [The Apprentice Tourist]. At the end of the 1920’s, the Brazilian Paulista writer’s travels to the Northeast and Amazonia, have as their aim the rediscovery of his own culture, to learn the traditions, the legends, the customs of his immense country. After having torn up an issue of *Os Lusiadas* to mark their refusal of European tradition,
after having proclaimed their disgust for European and French influence in particular, comes this attempt at auto-ethnography which constitutes an anti-tourism propelled by the desire for a return to one’s roots.

As anthropologist Paul Stoller states, “Throughout the history of anthropology, ethnographers have been participant observers who reflect on their visual experiences and then write texts that represent the Other’s pattern of kinship, exchange, or religion (Stoller 1994, 637). But Andrade is doing more than reflecting his visual experiences and describing patterns. He is appropriating, rewriting, imagining, experimenting, challenging, in an effort to provide Brazil with a new range of symbols, forged from a multiplicity of sources. His ethnography is meant to be revelatory but not necessarily in a didactic way, as is the case with the Regionalists and Indigenists. There is a liberating strain in his attempt to break with tradition, akin to Bandeira’s decrying of the suffocating constraints of the puristas, and Arthur Ramos’s insistence on textual liberation as we saw in chapter two. Price-Mars called for a literature that made use of folklore in the spirit of preservation. By “anthropophagizing” the legend and folktales concerning his hero, Andrade has at once liberated the figure of Macunaíma from the constraints of remaining a static relic of folklore and provided an element of Brazilian literary history that is a synthesis of pre-Columbian and postcolonial oraliture and literary traditions.

Andrade’s ethnographic research undertaken during his travels to the Northeast (a pilgrimage which other writers and filmmakers will also make), illustrates an important point made by Fabian: “Nor is it adequate to think of fieldwork as piecemeal induction: forms of social existence cannot be apprehended simply from the outside – the investigator must be able to make a personal reconstruction of the synthesis
characterizing them, he must not merely analyze their elements, but apprehend them as a whole in the form of a personal experience – his own (Fabian 64).” By “ingesting” and processing the indigenous tales of Macunaima, rewriting and making a composite of Brazil’s folklore, mythology and history, Andrade sought to take the disparate elements of his country’s heritage and forge a new mythology and folklore cognizant of the consequences of history. The hybridity of this text, reflecting Brazil’s multiculturalism, is, in its configuration and characters, uniquely Brazilian, a new literary legacy that Andrade leaves to his compatriots.

As we shall see in the next section, the overarching elements made use of by Andrade, namely mythology, folklore, religion, language and history are patterned in another constellation that makes Depestre’s first novel singularly Haitian. The work is also a response to the relative conformity of the Indigenist novel, a critique of radicalized Négritude and a testament to artistic freedom. Finally, it is a work that invites interpretation because of its layers of signification.

Depestre and Le Mât de cocagne: Indigéniste noirisme in Hindsight

René Depestre is very much a child of the Occupation, a precocious teenager deeply influenced by the aims of Indigénisme and the autoethnography that shaped its aspirations. Indigénisme marked a radical rupture with the longstanding perception Haitians had of themselves and of their culture. Yannick Lahens states: “L’indigénisme s’explique par la genèse même de la société haïtienne née d’une révolte contre la domination d’une puissance coloniale [Indigenism is explained by the genesis of Haitian society itself, born of a revolt against the domination of a colonial power] (Lahens 63). It
is in the context of this nativist interrogation with its refocused attention on Africa, and of a nascent Négritude articulated by Senegalese author Léopold Sédar Senghor, Martinican writer Aimé Césaire and French Guyanese writer Léon Gontran Damas as well as the arrival of Surrealism on the shores of Haiti that the young Depestre comes of age.

Like the writers of the Indigéniste school, Depestre’s work is marked by the need to break with the literary past and the effort to embark on a literature of self-knowledge. As he states with regard to the need for a new form of expression, « nous avons connu l’esprit de résignation, de soumission, d’imitation. Nous avons eu le bovarysme intellectuel de nos pseudo-élites, qui poussait celles-ci à se jeter, comme dit Fanon, ‘dans l’acquisition forcéene de la culture de l’occupant’ » [We have known the spirit of resignation, of submission, of imitation. We have had the intellectual bovarysme [Price-Mars’s term] of the pseudo-elites, which pushed these to throw themselves, as Fanon states “into the acquisition of the imposed culture of the occupant] (Depestre 251). While Editor-in-Chief of the revolutionary scholarly journal La Ruche, the nineteen year old Depestre’s first work, a volume of poetry called Étincelles, [Sparks], is published in 1945, the year of André Breton’s visit to Haiti and the year of Mário de Andrade’s untimely death.

In discussing Haitian cultural identity, Depestre explains the importance of Price-Mars’s observations: « [Jean Price-Mars] mit l’accent sur l’aliénation dramatique qui résulte chez tout peuple qui méprise une part des composantes historiques de sa conscience sociale » [Jean Price-Mars emphasized the dramatic alienation that occurs to all peoples who disdain a part of the historical components of their social conscience] (Depestre 134). Achieving a balance between this dual heritage has been an on-going
challenge for writers of the French-Creole-speaking Caribbean. In her comparative study on *Négritude* in the Francophone Antilles and Brazilian Modernism, Maria Lourdes Teodoro makes the following observation regarding this ambivalence: « *en Haïti comme aux Antilles françaises, l’élite se trouve partagée entre un patrimoine culturel franco-antillais à l’exclusion d’éléments rappelant l’Afrique, tandis que les meneurs de la renaissance antillaise chercheront à déterrer et mettre en relief ce passé dont on a honte et ces liens avec l’Afrique dont on pourra ensuite s’enorgueillir* » [In Haiti, as in the French Antilles, the elite finds itself split between a Franco-Antillean cultural patrimony to the exclusion of elements recalling Africa, while the leaders of the Antillean Renaissance would seek to unearth and highlight this past of which they were ashamed and those links with Africa of which they could later be proud] (Lourdes Teodoro 200).

Even the chief advocate for an Africanist perspective of Haitian cultural heritage, Jean Price-Mars, could not entirely distance himself from the elitist predilection for thinking of itself as French and the privilege it associated with this: « *La France pouvait être encore fière du rayonnement de sa culture sur une terre qui fut autrefois française et qui a gardé par delà 131 ans de séparation et d’affranchissement politique l’ineffaçable empreinte du génie français. […] Sénateur Béranger...prononça les retentissantes paroles que voici : « Haïti est le phare avancé de la latinité en Amérique ! »* [France could still be proud of the influence of its culture in a land that was once French and which has maintained, despite 131 years of separation and political freedom, the indelible imprint of French genius. Senator Béranger...uttered the following, resounding words: “Haiti is the distant beacon of Latinity in America”] (Price-Mars 1966, 45).
Depestre sees this almost contradictory stance of Price-Mars’s as a theoretical error in supposing that cultures in contact can remain distinct from each other:

L’Afrique au premier lieu, l’Europe ensuite, sont présentes dans la conscience sociale et dans les mœurs du peuple haïtien comme l’expression métissé, syncrétique, en perpétuel changement, des diverses conditions d’existence sociale que les Haïtiens ont connus avant la Traite, durant l’époque tragique de l’esclavage, et sous régime semi-féodal et semi-colonial issu de la Révolution de 1804. Ainsi ce serait une grave erreur à propos d’Haïti (comme à propos des autres pays qui participent d’un double héritage culturel) de considérer séparément, isolément, la culture africaine, ou la culture française, ou encore la culture indienne. Et c’est encore plus grave encore que de parler de culture noire et de culture blanche, ou d’autres catégories fantasmatiques, insaisissables, mystificatrices, qui apparaissent chez ceux qui, du fait de leur idéalisme philosophique ou de leur égoïsme de classe, séparent l’évolution des idées du développement économique et social propre à chaque peuple. [Depestre 1968, 174].

[First Africa, then Europe, are present in the social conscience and in the customs of the Haitian people in the hybrid, syncretic expression in perpetual flux of the diverse conditions of social existence that the Haitians had known before the slave trade, during the tragic era of slavery, and under the semi-feudal and semi-colonial system stemming from the 1804 Revolution. As such it would be a grave error with regard to Haiti (as it is with other countries who share a dual cultural heritage), to consider separately or in isolation, French, African or Indigenous culture. And it is an even greater error to speak of black culture, of white culture or other phantasmagoric, unattainable, mystifying categories which appear among those who, by the fact of their philosophical ideals or their class egoism, separate the evolution of ideas from the economic and social development unique to each people.]

Depestre is sensitive to the possible biases of researchers and how their “philosophical ideals” influence their conclusions, hinting that the persistent racial categories serve to
preserve certain historical perspectives. Furthermore, for Depestre the hybrid nature of Haitian culture is not unique to Haiti, but is a pan-American phenomenon that the poet sees recurring in Brazil, in the United States and in the Caribbean. This does not erase the national characteristics and differences in development, in economics or social life according to Depestre (Lourdes Teodoro 95). This specificity in the face of common historical trajectories is what makes indiscriminate generalities impossible when discussing, for example, Caribbean or Latin American literature; one is able, however, to look for patterns.39

In exile since the 1950s, Depestre’s life, like that of Andrade’s protagonist, is marked by errancy, his exploration of cultural identity made all the more acute by the self-reflection his travels force the writer to confront. Through the prism of cross-cultural contact, Depestre is well placed to occupy the position of the autoethnographer, at once an insider and an outsider. Although his work on Haiti would not fall into the category of travel writing, his collection of short stories, *Eros dans un train chinois*, is a work indicative of Depestre’s wanderings. But it is also the work of a politically engaged writer with a critical stance marked by exile and errancy, not the work of a tourist on holiday and as such it exemplifies the following perspective posited by Jean-Marc Moura: « *Le récit du voyageur correspond à une littérature de la révélation, rapatriant l’inconnu dans le quotidien du non-voyageur...Il possède l’inaliénable privilège d’un regard contemplant un monde inouï qu’il s’approprie avant de le révéler aux lecteurs afin d’asseoir sa différence. La rhétorique du « Voilà ce dont je témoigne », venue de l’Antiquité et du Moyen-Age, signale le luxe inégalable d’avoir pu contempler des*}

39 One such notable work is Antonio Bénitez Rojo’s *La Isla que se repite* [The Repeating Island].
Travel writing corresponds to a literature of revelation, repatriating the stranger into the daily existence of the non-traveler... he possesses the inalienable privilege of a gaze contemplating an unknown world that he appropriates before revealing it to readers after having established its difference. The rhetoric of “Here is what I witness”, coming from Antiquity and from the Middle Ages, signals the unrivaled luxury of having been able to contemplate unknown, forgotten or disappeared territories] (Moura 271). Colonial chronicles beginning with the discovery of the Americas provide a rich source for historical, anthropological and ethnographic research.

The tradition also provides for postcolonial re-readings that expand our understanding of the processes at work within the conceptualizations of witnessing and readership and the evolution of the genre through the ages. And so in opposition to the sensationalist travel writings of authors such as Craige and Seabrook on Haiti, in this instance, it is the Haitian writer abroad who engages in a fictionalized account of his travels (Leconte 2004, 165). Once again, it is difficult to discern where the traveler’s perceptions end and where the invention begins. Depestre’s brand of travel writing is characteristic of an author who is (to borrow a phrase from scholar Renée Larrier) “the

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40 In this interview, Depestre recounts that after having worked with Pablo Neruda in Chile, subsequently living in Agentina and Brazil, he became a French teacher in São Paulo under an assumed name: « C’est ainsi que j’ai été prof. de français à São Paulo. Ma femme et moi nous avons ainsi réussi à gagner notre vie en menant une double vie d’ailleurs. J’avais un faux nom. Je rentrais dans une sorte de clandestinité et c’était très dangereux au Brésil parce que l’on torturait les intellectuels de gauche. J’ai donc décidé de retourner à Paris...grâce à mes amis Césaire et Senghor, j’ai pu vivre à Paris à condition de ne pas me mêler de nouveau des affaires de décolonisation. » [That’s how it came to be that I was a French teacher in São Paulo. That is how my wife and I made a living while leading a double life no less. I had an alias. I entered into a sort of clandestinity, which was very dangerous in Brazil because Leftist intellectuals were tortured. So I decided to return to Paris...and thanks to my friends Césaire and Senghor, I was able to live in Paris with the condition that I refrain from further butting into the business of decolonization.]
consummate example of the Caribbean writer who refuses to be bound by borders of any kind, geographical or literary” (Larrier 2006, 144).

The difference is that Depestre’s work is not offered the guise of documentary, as it falls into the fictional genre. This does not, however, make it devoid of ethnographic observation. The Haitian author’s works are filled with cultural observations, whether the story takes place in his native Haiti or abroad. Furthermore, ethnography is a field of interest for the writer, as his essays attest, demonstrating Depestre’s knowledge of the work of Latin American anthropologists. Of particular interest here is Depestre’s Brazilian interlude in the 1950’s while in exile. A poem and short story featuring Brazil that I analyze here, are self-reflective works that interrogate the interface of race, class and culture from the traditional vantage point of the ethnographer: the outside.

Two works appearing to hint at a certain disillusionment felt by the Haitian author at the reality of race relations in the Brazilian city are the 1955 poem “Lettre à ma Mère” from the collection *Mineraí noir* and the short story “Samba pour Cristina de Melo Pessoa,” one of two stories with São Paulo as the locale. One may conclude that Depestre’s choice in moving to Brazil as an exile is initially based on his interest in pan-American ethnography and his friendship with Jorge Amado. One wonders how much

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41 Although Larrier is describing Maryse Condé in the sentence, I feel that this assessment is equally applicable to René Depestre, whose corpus incorporates a variety of styles and tendencies including Magical Realism, Surrealism, autoethnography, poetry, etc.

42 The actual publication date for the collection of short stories *Eros dans un train chinois*, is 1990. However, based on dates given in some of the stories as to when the events take place, we have a wide range: 1947, 1948, 1958, 1984. These tales are semi-autobiographical and take place all over the world, suggesting the possibility that this was an on-going project over several decades.

43 Jorge Amado: *Navegação de Cabotagem: Apontamentos Para um Livro de Memórias Que Jamais Escreverei*, Publicações Europa-América, 1992, [113]: Amado recounts meeting fellow communist René Depestre and his wife for the first time in Prague, Czechoslovakia: *Praga, 1950 – o secretário...encontro René Depestre, rapazola, num beco sem saída em Praga. Posto fora da França, o exilado haitiano, moço poeta, militante comunista, recém-casado, buscara asilo na Checoslováquia...por um breve período, o*
sway Gilberto Freyre’s articulation of Brazil’s purported racial democracy held on
Depestre’s choice of São Paulo as a destination. Like Price-Mars, Depestre is very aware
of the work of Brazilian scholars and writers:

Nous n’avons pas parlé du Brésil : c’est, dans le panorama historique américain, tout un monde sui generis, qui
demanderait une étude consacrée à lui seul. Là aussi, avec
des coordonnées nationales différentes, le sentiment racial
s’est exprimé dans les lettres et les arts, du formidable
Aleijadinho à Jorge Amado, de Luis Gama à Jorge de
Lima, de Machado de Assis à José Lins do Rêgo, de Tobias
Barreto à Raquel [sic] de Queiroz, de Castro Alves à
Guimaraes Rosa, d’Euclides da Cunha à Gilberto Freyre.
Celui-ci, avec Casa Grande e Senzala (1933), marqua une
étape décisive de la prise de conscience de l’identité
brésilienne et eut un grand retentissement sur les lettres du
pays. Nous renvoyons le lecteur aux travaux d’Antonio
Candido, de Roger Bastide, aux études de Florestan
Fernandez (et l’école sociologique de São Paulo : F.
Fernandez, Bastide, F. H. Cardoso, O. Ianni, Costa Pinto,
etc.) qui, en plaçant la connaissance des rapports couplés
classe/race dans le contexte brésilien et international, ont
rénové complètement les approches purement
ethnologiques de Raymond Nina Rodriguez ou
d’Arthur Ramos (Depestre 149).

[We have not spoken of Brazil: it is, in the historical
American panorama, an entire world sui generis, which
would require a study devoted to it alone. Here also, with
different national coordinates, the racial sentiments have
been expressed in the letters and in the arts, from the
formidable Aleijadinho to Jorge Amado, from Luis Gama
to Jorge de Lima, from Machado Assis to José Lins do
Rêgo, from Tobias Barreto to Raquel [sic] de Queiroz,
from Castro Alves to Guimaraes Rosa, from Euclides da

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escritor Rene Depestre, o de Hadriana de tous mes rêves, hoje celebridade literária, Prix Renaudot, foi
meu secretário, apenas nominal, sem obrigações, sem salário: pôde trabalhar sua poesia Minerai noir.

[Prague, 1950 – The Secretary... I met a very young René Depestre, in a cul-de-sac in Prague. Cast out of
France, the Haitian exile, young poet, militant communist, newlyed, seeking exile in Czechoslovakia ... for
a brief period, the writer René Depestre, author of Hadriana de tous mes rêves, today a celebrated writer,
winner of the Prix Renaudot, was my secretary, really in name only, without obligations, with no salary: he
was able to work on his book of poetry [Minerai noir.] See also Franz-Antoine Leconte « Dérive politique et
synergie esthétique... »}
Cunha to Gilberto Freyre. This last, with Casa Grande e Senzala (1933), would mark a decisive stage in the consciousness raising of Brazilian identity and had great repercussions on the letters of the country. We refer the reader to the works of Antonio Candido, of Roger Bastide, to the studies of Florestan Fernandez (and the São Paulo school of Sociology: F. Fernandez, Bastide, F. H. Cardoso, O. Ianni, Costa Pinto, etc.) who, in placing the knowledge of the paired relationship class/race in the Brazilian and international context, have completely renovated the purely ethnological approaches of Raymondo Nina Rodriguez or Arthur Ramos.

The passage shows Depestre’s extensive knowledge of the trajectory of Brazilian cultural studies and the extent to which the work of social scientists in Brazil influenced the work of some of Brazil’s most prolific novelists. For Depestre, the apport of outside scholars led to a revitalization of the work of the pioneers in Brazilian ethnography, which in turn proved generative and fertile in the literary and artistic domains. The Haitian writer makes a direct connection between the social sciences and literature as well as distinguishing the “purely ethnological” work of Ramos and Nina Rodriguez. However, we have seen in the previous chapter that Ramos was very actively a part of the literary scene and that his work, with its focus on cultural symbolism and the collectivity, is in the field interpretive anthropology.

Nevertheless, it is implicit that Depestre sees himself as working within that “historical American panorama” particularly since Haiti has also had a history of writing where social sciences and ethnography intersect. This awareness brings a further relevance to Depestre’s own work on the cusp of literature and the social sciences. Not only can we read Depestre’s work on Brazil as that of an observer, his own exile from Haiti for several decades provides him a distinctive vantage point which disrupts the neat
dichotomy of inside/outside. Retrospective distance and world experience allows Depestre to assess the apport of ethnography to literature in both synchronic and diachronic contexts.

There is little doubt that Brazil was an attractive possibility for one forced to flee his native land. Both the poem and the short story are, however, case studies for an acutely-felt disappointment. A light-complected black man of letters (albeit from humble origins), who enjoyed the privileges that this entailed in Haiti prior to the Duvalierist era suddenly being made to feel like a second-class citizen based on race in a country like Brazil with a large number of blacks and mixed-race peoples, a nation touted as being a racial democracy, could be no less than a rude awakening. There is a certain amount of bitterness contained in the lines of the São Paulo writings, particularly in Depestre’s “open letter” to his mother. It is, in its way, a response to Brazil’s image as a “racial democracy.”

Below is an excerpt from the poem “Lettre à ma Mère” in which the author “responds” to questions asked by a concerned and hopeful mother, separated from her exiled son and hopeful that Brazil’s reputation as a racial democracy affords her son some comfort. The direct address is fraught with tension, reflecting issues of race and class, of development and institutionalized exclusion:

**Lettre à ma Mère**

« Que deviennent les nègres, me demandes-tu ?
Que deviennent les nôtres, tout le long des ports ?
Après avoir couru tant d’horizons lointains
Donne-moi les nouvelles du sang nègre
Dis-moi si Sao-Paulo le laisse tutoyer à sa guise les étoiles
Si Sao-Paulo le laisse dormir sur ses deux oreilles de coquelicots. »

...ici je vois peu d’hommes en dehors des nègres
je vois des autos de luxe des bêtises de luxe
j’entends des paroles de luxe des bêtises de luxe
je croise de blancs visages de plaisance
qui bénissent le ciel
de ne les avoir pas fait noirs
(ou de ne pas le paraître).

Ici mère, je coudoie peu d’hommes en dehors des nègres
et une poignée de blancs
que l’argent n’a pas eu
une poignée de blancs
sur qui l’argent n’a pas de prise
une poignée de blancs
qui lui rend la vie dure
une poignée de blancs
chez qui l’homme veille encore
chez qui l’homme est debout
chez qui l’homme est immortel
une poignée de blanc un océan de noirs !
(Depestre 1956)

[“What becomes of the blacks you ask me?
What becomes of our own, all along the ports?
After having traveled so many distant horizons
Give me news of black blood
Tell me if São Paulo allows it to speak familiarly and at its pleasure to the
stars
If São Paulo allows it to sleep on its pillow of poppies”]

...here I see few men outside of the blacks
I see luxury cars, luxurious nonsense
I hear luxurious words, luxurious nonsense
I cross white faces of leisure
Who bless the sky
for not having made them black
(or not having them look it).

Here mother, I encounter few men other than blacks
and a handful of whites
whom money has not had
a handful of whites
over whom money has no hold
a handful of whites
who render its life difficult
a handful of whites
in whom man still watches
in whom man still stands
There is a certain hopefulness in the framing of the question, as if the expectation that an earthly paradise for blacks had possibly been found, hearkening back to Freyre’s utopian vision of Brazil as a color-blind society. Instead of the idealized space, the author finds himself in a conflicted milieu, whereby only a chosen few, a “handful” can see (in Marxist terms) the influence of capital, and resist its powerful draw. The hypocrisy of racial democracy is hidden behind the façade of “whitening” or “branqueamento,” where those who do not look black count it as a blessing. The experience of Depestre in Brazil reflects on both Brazilian and Haitian society. The writer’s travels afford him repeated opportunities to reflect upon the effects of these numerous displacements on his own identity, but also on the notion of being a writer rooted (emotionally, psychologically) in a given place. Depestre’s several decades in exile (more than fifty years as of this writing), have provided him a complexity that continues to influence his identity as a Caribbean author and poet, more particularly, a Haitian man of letters: “Instead of being a man with a simple root, I have acquired others during the years: Brazilian, Chilean, Argentine, and more particularly Cuban roots because I lived in Cuba for twenty years. Naturally, there are also the French and African components of my identity” (Taleb-Khyar 550).

In “Samba pour Cristina de Melo Pessoa,” the sharp contrast between being a French educator and being a French educator from Haiti plays out in the home of a socialite who hires a character named Alain Ricabier for lessons in French. We learn that in truth, Cristina de Melo Pessoa speaks perfect French. What she truly desires is
someone with whom she can discuss French literature. She finds Ricabier (also the narrator), through a blind advertisement in the newspaper. Ricabier begins his account with the text of the advertisement:


[It was 39 years ago, perhaps it was 439 years ago, I was then teaching French in São Paulo. I recruited my students thanks to an advertisement that I placed in the famous daily newspaper O Estado do São Paulo: “Young poet, deg. Univ. Paris. Gives Fr. less. at home. also lit. class. pedag. Lively and effic.” The telephone number followed where I could be found in the early morning. Following the advice of a “white” friend, I had removed the adjective Haitian before poet.

Despite the narrator’s obvious qualifications for teaching French, national identity weighs in heavily enough to have to be removed from the equation, leading to the excision of the descriptor “Haitian.” In a country that touts its racial blindness, race is such a problematic factor that it forces the narrator to place the marker “white” in quotes, highlighting the importance given to a highly dubious and relative category. The access provided to the friend based on his perceived social identity, places him in a position of knowledge, information that he is generously willing to share with Ricabier: « [Alvaro m’avait dit] Après les grandes cités des U.S.A. São Paulo est, juste avant La Havane, l’agglomération la plus raciste de l’hémisphère occidental. Ici deux choses se multiplient mieux que les champignons : vers les hauteurs, le gratte-ciel ; vers les égouts, la superstition raciale ! »
[Álvaro had told me] that after the great cities of the U.S.A., São Paulo is, just ahead of Havana, the most racist agglomeration in the western hemisphere. Here, two things multiply faster than mushrooms: toward the skies, the sky-scaper; toward the sewers, racial prejudice!”) (Depestre “Samba” 149). The comments are illustrative of the one area of focus found in the comparatist pan-American studies taking place in the social sciences during the early decades of the twentieth century. In scenes reminiscent of Martinican essayist Frantz Fanon’s “L’expérience vécue du noir,” the narrator goes on to tell of the dismayed reactions of his potential clients (Fanon 1995). Although very excited at the prospect of learning French while speaking with him over the phone, the clients are incredulous and hostile during the in-person encounter: « Vous enseignez donc le français aux Blancs, n’est-ce pas ? Moi j’apprends le droit romain au personnel d’Itamarati ?! Un gros mot de menteur de plus je vous casse un bras ! Allons, ouste ! hors d’ici, marquis de carnaval carioca ! »... père, mère, futur élève – à voir débarquer un preto amidonné, au lieu du champagne parisien qui était attendu [“So you teach French to whites, isn’t that so? Me, I teach Roman Law to the personnel of Itamarati! One more lying word out of you and I’ll break your arm! Let’s go, out! Get out of here, carioca carnival marquis!” ...father, mother, future student – to see a starched black arrive instead of the Parisian champagne which was awaited] (Depestre, Samba 150-151).

The fact that the narrator has studied in France and has the requisite qualifications is dwarfed by the preconceived notion that a black is incapable of being just what Ricabier purports to be. Instead stereotypes reign and the lack of intra-hemispheric awareness is

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44 Brazilians such as Freyre and poet and playwright Vinicius de Moraes, who traveled to the U.S. during the years of Segregation were quite vocal in their disdain for the system.

45 A footnote on p. 150 indicates that this is the Brazilian Quai d’Orsay (a famous train station in Paris, now a museum), a smaller version of Grand Central Station.
implied as it appears to never dawn on the clients that French is spoken in neighboring French Guyana or in the Caribbean.

Instead, the aspersions cast upon a perceived fellow countryman, (the term *carioca* designating a native of the city of Rio de Janeiro), unmask the regionalist prejudices that exist within Brazil. Unlike the clients that his protagonist Ricabier encounters, Depestre shows off his awareness of Brazilian culture. Clearly, there is a pejorative intent in both the use of the word *carioca* and the allusion to carnival with its association of masking one’s identity. Despite Cristina de Melo Pessoa’s initial astonishment upon seeing Ricabier face to face, she proves to be of an open mind, and is all too happy to have someone with whom to discuss Camus, Sartre, Gracq, Françoise Sagan. Once again, as discussed in chapter two, the historically pervasive influence of French letters on Haiti and on Brazil is the source of intertextual reference and the problematic idealism of Negritude is highlighted in the angry words of the irate husband:

— « Pas question qu’il le continue. Tu fais un chèque au cabocle. Paye-lui le mois entier, six mois, un an, peu importe. Et ouste à la négritude ! » (Depestre, Samba 159-160)\(^{46}\)

— His remaining is out of the question. Write a check out to the Caboclo. Pay him a month, six months, a year, I don’t care. And away with Negritude!

Melo Vespucci and his maid have found common ground; racial prejudice is, in this case, something of a curious equalizer, transcending class. Melo Vespucci is “worried” about what his servants as well as his neighbors will think. The rigidity of the racial divide and the class hierarchy (which even the servants perceive as inviolable and would not dare to breach) has not, in his mind, evolved since the days of his grandmother. Melo Vespucci

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\(^{46}\) The footnote in the text provides the reader the definition for *caboclo* [caboclo], a person of mixed Indian and Caucasian heritage.
points to cultural particularity in insisting about “our decorum in this country,” a point that reflects Depestre’s own ethnographic observation. Interestingly enough, Ricabier is referred to as both a black and half-breed (in the pejorative sense that it would be used in the U.S. to refer to a person of mixed Indian and white heritage).

In a gesture of supreme rebellion, disdain and revenge after Melo Vespucci’s departure, Ricabier and Cristina engage in a game of mutual seduction, cuckolding the arrogant husband. One might go so far as to say that the choice of the name, Vespucci, is symbolic of the entire colonial enterprise, and so this revenge for the attempted emasculation of Ricabier by Melo Vespucci who refuses to treat the other man as an equal, is also a gesture toward the larger question of the legacy of slavery and all that this entails.

The exclamation “Away with Negritude!” is symbolic of Depestre’s point of contention with the movement: the inherent tendency that it has shown toward essentialization. In a sharp critique of Price-Mars’s lack of condemnation of what Depestre views as the bastardization of his ideas, Depestre writes in the preface of the Spanish translation of *Ainsi parla l’oncle* (translated as *Así habló el tío*):

> Director de ideas y de opiniones, ha tolerado que discípulos sin fe ni ley interpreten de la manera más absurda sus teorías. Principal iniciador haitiano del movimiento de ideas que debería el nombre de “negritude”, Price-Mars jamás a lo largo de los años, ha desautorizado a aquellos que, como el tirano François Duvalier se ha servido de su autoridad intelectual para utilizar el concepto de “negritude” con fines escandalosamente demagógicos y obscurantistas. En la actualidad, basta lanzar una mirada sobre la extrema aflicción de la condición humana en Haití para ver hasta qué punto la “negritud” de Duvalier es una delirante mistificación en la que capas más reaccionarias de la sociedad haitiana han encontrado su ideología y sus
métodos de acción. La “negritud” de Duvalier es una
delirante mistificación en la que una forma antillana del
fascismo, un neoracismo totalitario cuyas principales
víctimas son los millones de campesinos y de trabajadores
negros de Haití. Esto es tan cierto que el propio Jean
Price-Mars, llegado al final de su vida, ha sentido la
necesidad, en un acceso de probidad intelectual y de valor
moral, de protestar contra la tenebrosa utilización que
Duvalier ha hecho de sus ideas (Depestre (Price-Mars) X
[1968]).

[Director of ideas and opinions [Price-Mars] tolerated that
unscrupulous disciples interpreted his ideas in the most
absurd way. Principal Haitian instigator of the movement
of ideas later to be known as “negritude” Price-Mars never,
over the years, denounced those who, like the tyrant
François Duvalier, used his intellectual authority to employ
the concept of “negritude” to scandalously demagogical
and obscurantist ends. In reality, it is enough to glance at
the extreme affliction of the human condition in Haiti to see
to what extent that Duvalier’s “negritude” is a delirious
mystification in which the most reactionary stratum of
Haitian society has encountered its ideology and its
method. The “negritude” of Duvalier is a delirious fascist
mystification, a totalitarian neoracism whose primary
victims are the millions of peasants and black workers of
Haiti. This is so true that Jean Price-Mars himself felt it
necessary, having arrived at the end of his life, in a moment
of intellectual probity and moral valor, to protest against
the tenebrous utilization of his ideas that Duvalier had
perpetrated.

With his use of quotations around the word Negritude, might we not see a distinction
being made between the regressive and progressive poles of its interpretation? Depestre
does not altogether reject Negritude itself (he acknowledges both his disputes with the
concept and his respect and admiration for Price-Mars and Césaire in several interviews).
Rather he reworks it, formulating his own ideas on the significance of the ideological
moment that brought it about.
For Joan Dayan, [Depestre’s] *Négritude* is an evolving principle wherein “a black boy, a drop of pure water” moves from his particular situation as Black to his universal situation as a man oppressed who senses solidarity with other oppressed peoples of all hues and nationalities (Depestre 1977, viii). This universality is evident in the final stanza of *Letter to my Mother*, but the concept of *Négritude* is nonetheless problematic for Depestre and after his initial embrace of it, there is a step away from it, a definite contemplation of its deeper significance.

Certainly in Haiti its legacy has proved problematic. Peasant ways, folklore and *Vodu*, make up the very elements championed by Price-Mars, the *indigéniste* writers, and the chief advocates of *noirisme* Duvalier and Lorimer Denis. However these fundamental cultural markers were utilized by the dictator François Duvalier as a way of encouraging superstition, of inspiring fear, of fostering barbarism and exploiting the rift between rich and poor, mulatto and black. In the eyes of Depestre the recoding of these symbols into a sinister system of terror amounts to a corruption of cultural identity by a national order tainted by criminal intent. It is against this backdrop that the protagonist of *Le Mât de cocagne* finds the will to defy the establishment and transcend his fate, and by extension that of his people.

Depestre sees *Vodu* under Duvalier as a tool used in the mystification of a people, a means to manipulate the masses, a reductive (and misunderstood) identity imposed upon the Haitian people and used to nefarious ends. J Michael Dash describes the Duvalier dictatorship in the following terms:

> [T]he extreme nature of the Duvalierist state makes it the most disturbing manifestation of state power in Haitian history. Duvalier consolidated state power by first of all neutralizing all the institutions in civil society that could
pose a threat to his regime. Schools, churches, trade unions, universities, and the media were all undermined as priests were expelled, journalists tortured, and intellectuals forced into exile (Dash 2001).

In *Le Mât de cocagne*, the protagonist describes the Duvalierist’s effort at rendering Haitian culture “transparent,” consisting of a single dimension that Depestre immediately ascribes to the nebulous entity “they”: « *On nous a fabriqué une histoire collective qui s’appelle électrification des âmes* » [They have fabricated a collective history for us that is called the electrification of souls] (Depestre ). The pronoun “they” can be interpreted as referring to Duvalier and his cohorts as well as to the political forces of the West and, we may also include Hollywood filmmakers infatuated with the notion of the *zombi*, all of whom Depestre views as complicit in the creation of this mendacious cultural identity. Despite the tactic of camouflaging the subject of his novel, it is obvious to anyone familiar with Haiti that Depestre is attempting to unmask the political failings and socially disastrous legacy of Duvalier’s *noiriste* doctrine. As Stanley Péan states in his article on Depestre and Andrade: « *Depestre ne cache pas qu’il s’inspire de l’imaginaire populaire de son île natale. Dans le Mât de Cocagne, pour dévoiler la réalité haïtienne, il recourt à la symbolique folklorique d’une contrée prétendument fictive qui, écrit-il dans une note liminaire, ‘ ressemble, en plus fou, au pays de cocagne.’* » [Depestre doesn’t hide that he is inspired by the popular imagination of his native island. In *Le Mât de cocagne*, in order to reveal Haitian reality, he turns to the folkloric symbolism of a supposedly fictional country that, he writes in a footnote “resembles, in the craziest way, the country of *cocagne*…”] (Péan 53). 47

47 “Cocagne” refers to an imaginary and idyllic country where abundance and harmony reign.
The initial step Depestre takes in the novel is to defy the categorization of the text itself. In the prologue, he includes a disclaimer:

Prologue: Le mât de cocagne n’est ni une chronique historique, ni un roman à clef, ni une œuvre d’origine autobiographique. Le Grand pays zacharien dont il est parlé est, de toute évidence, une contrée imaginaire qui ressemble, en plus fou, au pays de cocagne. Les événements et les personnages de ce récit appartiennent donc à la pure fiction. Toute ressemblance avec des êtres, des animaux, des arbres, vivants ou ayant vécu, toute similitude, proche ou lointaine, de noms, de situations, de lieux, de systèmes, de roues dentées de fer ou de feu, ou bien avec tout autre scandale de la vie réelle, ne peuvent être l’effet que d’une coïncidence « non seulement fortuite, mais proprement scandaleuse ». L’auteur en décline fermement la responsabilité, au nom de ce que des esprits éclatants de rigueur et de tendresse ont appelé les « droits imprescriptibles de l’imagination » (Mât de cocagne 10).

[Prologue: The greasy pole is neither an historical chronicle, nor a roman à clef, nor a work of autobiographical origin. The great Zacharian country of which it speaks, is by all accounts, an imaginary country which resembles, in a mad way, the land of plenty. The events and the characters of this tale belong to the realm of pure fiction. All resemblance to people, animals, tree, living or having lived, all similitude, near or far, situations, of place, of systems of wheels serrated by iron or by fire, or else with all other real life scandals, can only be coincidental, “not only fortuitous but properly scandalous.” The author firmly declines the responsibility, in the name of that which brilliant, rigorous and tender spirits have named the “inalienable rights of the imagination.”

[note: Cockaigne pole: pole coated with grease or soot set up during festivals at the top of which are hung prizes to be won by those able to climb to the top. The land of Cockaigne from Medieval lore is the land of the plenty, where life is a round of luxurious idleness. In Cockaigne there are rivers of wine, house built of cake and barley sugar and streets paved with pastry. Roast geese and fowls wander about inviting people to eat them, and buttered larks fall from the sky like manna (From the Encyclopedia Brittanica)]. Hal Wylie “René Depestre Speaks of Negritude, Cuba, Socialist Writing, Communist Eros and His Most Recent Works”, The GAR, Texas: Gar Pub.Vol.33 Feb. 1979 (May 1976): [20]
Depestre’s last line recalls Bandeira’s battle cry in “Poética”: Abaixo os Puristas! [Down with the Purists!] and Ramos’s insistence on freedom of choice in the Arts. The rejection of genre, a modernist move, is an element that Depestre’s text has in common with Macunaíma. It is a gesture that insists upon the fact that culture is too vast to be classified and that a typical novel, which conforms to a certain prescribed format, is inadequate to address the complexity of representations of cultural identity. For the narrator to insist that the events and characters detailed in the work are pure fiction, particularly when anyone familiar with the history of the island nation knows that it is not “purely” fictitious is an immediate challenge to the reader to engage with the narrative. And while playing with the notion of genre, Depestre also employs a type of camouflage which can only be transparent to those who can decipher the clues, hidden in plain sight, if you will. He closes his Epilogue mysteriously, with only the caption “Quelque part sous les tropiques” [Somewhere in the Tropics] and the date (Mât de cocagne 170). The characters’s names, for example are not those of their real life counterparts and the symbolism is of greater impact than any attempt at portraying verisimilitude. And so, even as the author is already calling into question his own credibility, we are asked to take his word that truth may indeed be stranger than fiction, as there is a coincidental and fortuitous possibility that such a place may indeed exist. And so we are asked to pretend that the city, Port-au-Roi is not the mirror reflection, the double of the capital city, Port-au-Prince (Wylie 1979 (1976), 20).48

48 In discussing the novel in an interview with Hal Wylie, Depestre himself has stated that certain events in the book were not fictitious invention: “It’s the fable of the Haitian tragedy, an allegory of the moral conscience confronted with the violence of “Papadocracy.” I tried to unveil the whole burlesque of the Papa Doc regime, by using phallic myths. It’s possible that my narration will shock certain readers. In speaking of the mat [sic] de cocagne I discovered, in my readings, that there is often, in many cultures, a connection between the phallus and the tree. This appears not only in Mesopotamian, Hindu, Chinese and Egyptian traditions, but also in Christianity, with the myth of the cross. It was tempting to use the universal myth of
This covert denunciation of Duvalier’s totalitarian regime with its own discourse of “pure fictions” which include trumped-up charges, false accusations, disappearances, denials and demagoguery and its exploitation of cultural identity for political gain also allows Depestre to question the counterpoetics of a paradise lost many exiled writers espoused beginning in the 1960’s. 49 Depestre’s strategy also employs a discourse of erasure, doubly coding the Duvalier years as symbolic of a nightmare one wishes to forget with its macabre irrationality of a truth that is “stranger” than fiction, operating under the inflected sign of the “unreal” rather than that of sheer invention.

Depestre begins the text with the telltale imprint of a fairy tale: « Il était une fois un homme d’action qui était contraint par l’État à gérer un petit commerce à l’entrée nord d’une ville des tropiques… [Once upon a time there was a man of action who was constrained by the State to manage a little business at the northern entrance of a tropical city….] (Depestre 1979, 11). But this is a dark tale, one of constraints and struggles. It is the story of one man’s insistence on resisting the corruption of culture. The first point of

the phallus by developing my story around the mat de cocagne, the transformed tree. I put a phallocratic harangue in the mouth of the Haitian dictator, a local version of the Latin-American dictators, there is in the Haitian satrap an inclination toward promiscuity, toward picaresque delirium. In the portrait of Zoocrate Zacharie, the tyrant in my story, I started with a true anecdote. About 1964 the rumor was circulated in Haiti that Dr. François Duvalier was impotent. Papa Doc took it as a considerable insult. He convoked thousands of people in Independence Plaza. He led in his spouse, the ‘First Lady of the Republic,’ and the supreme magistrate delivered approximately the following discourse: ‘The most recent infamous argument my adversaries have invented is the impotence of Duvalier. I have brought to this plaza, Simone, the venerated First Lady, so that she may give her opinion on the vital subject.’ Simone took the microphone. She said that her François is always there. ‘Every night he carries out his conjugal duties marvelously, like an ardent young man. Papa Doc is a Taureau-boeuf, as one says in Haitian. His impotence is an infamous lie fabricated by the camoquins [mulatto subversives] who are conspiring against the ‘Duvalierist Revolution.’ You see, truth is stranger than fiction. I didn’t invent a thing. Starting with this hardly banal anecdote from the terrible political folklore of Haiti, I reconstructed a Duvalierian discourse, a phallic delirium in which the dictator Zoocrate Zacharie confuses his imaginary sexual force with his political power. He proclaims, in tracing the history of the phallus in universal culture, that He is the State, and a very erect State, a Phallus-State, intent upon screwing the nation with vigor…I used one element from real life to create an allegorical fable, a tale of political fiction” [original emphasis].

49 This persistent discourse tended to camoufage Haiti’s problems prior to 1957, as if all had been idyllic in Haiti before Duvalier came to power.
contention for the protagonist is the representation of his island as an aberration, the inverted fairy tale is extended to the realm of the extra-diegetic: “On nous a fabriqué une histoire collective qui s’appelle électrification des âmes” [They have fabricated a collective history for us called the electrification of souls] (Depestre 1079, 16). There is an accusatory tone in this sentence, referring to the appropriation of Vodu and its reconceptualization as a sinister cult populated by zombies. The thread of complicity runs throughout the text as the following comment made by one of the characters attests: “Regarde dans quel état tes Noirs ont aidé des Blancs à jeter ton pays.” [Look at the condition into which your blacks have helped the whites toss your country]. Depestre refuses to turn a blind eye on those oppressors with whom he shares skin pigmentation, an implicit critique of the unified front under the banner of Négritude that the early articulators of the movement wanted to present.

Of course an ethnographic study of Haiti is incomplete without the inclusion of the “Syrians”, the large group of Levantine immigrants who came to the island at the turn of the twentieth century and who are indiscriminately lumped together under that moniker, no matter what their country of origin, (reminding us of Andrade’s “Little Italians” or “Polish women”). The paring down of immigrant identity appears to be a common element in both nations, an element highlighted in the two works being compared here. Assimilation, or absorption into the larger cultural body of the nation is a problematic preoccupation of nationalist discourses.

And so we have the polemical character:

“Habib Moutamad…le commerçant était l’un des hommes les plus détestés de la population. Il avait financé le coup d’État électoral du Grand Electrificateur quand celui-ci n’était que l’insignifiant docteur Zacharie...Contrairement
Habib Moutamad...the merchant was one of the most hated men among the population. He had financed the electoral coup d’état of the Great Electrifier when that one was no more than the insignificant doctor Zachary...Contrary to the other big merchants of the coast who, at the end of every afternoon, lowered the iron curtain of their establishments and drove to their air-conditioned villas in the hills. Moutamad lived above the Sheherazade, his flourishing food market. Moutamad had his fortune in a bank in Lausanne, but for his everyday operations, he maintained large sums at home... A widower still at the age of 53, he had not remarried. Once in a while he would visit Beirut, “happy city” he would say, where he would find pleasure in nights...nights which are worthy of a pasha for an Arab male who has money, and hot blood to cool in the fresh linen of the Hilton Palace.]

Moutamad is subtly coded as an outsider, remaining aloof from the local population, even the other wealthy merchants. Despite his open involvement in the country’s politics, Moutamad seems to prefer to maintain his distance on a personal level, going so far as to

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maintaining his widowhood even while evidently profiting on the misery of his compatriots. The flight of capital, kept in Swiss banks rather than invested in the nation, is addressed briefly here, but this societal failing is traditionally symptomatic of the wealthy elites across the board in Haiti.

The protagonist, Henri Postel is the college friend of the dictator and victim of the political situation of the island. In the words of the dictator, alternately referred to as “Chef-Spirituel-de-la-Nation, Excellence le Président à Vie, l’Honorable Zoocrate Zacharie and Grand Electrificateur, « [Postel] était en première année de droit quand je faisais l’externat à la Faculté de Médecine. Nous étions des camarades. Déjà à l’époque il avait la tête farcie d’idées subversives (Depestre 1979, (14, 23, 37, 13).51 [[Postel] was in his first year of Law School when I was doing my residency at the Medical School. We were friends. Even then, his head was stuffed full of subversive ideas]. Further on we learn more about Postel’s past : « Vous êtes un homme de culture, ci-devant sénateur de la République, un ancien Sorbonnard…» [You are a man of culture, a former Senator of the Republic and Sorbonne alumnus...] (Depestre 1979, 47). His enemies feel threatened because of Postel’s indomitable spirit despite his dire circumstances: “Le citoyen Postel offre une tendance marquée au dédoublement de la personnalité. Dans l’espace de moins de dix ans, il a cumulé, avec zèle égal, les activités de professeur de littérature, d’agitateur professionnel, sénateur, conspirateur, petit commerçant [Citizen Postel has a marked tendency toward a split personality. In the space of less than ten years, he has

accumulated with the same zeal, the role of professor of literature, professional agitator, senator, conspirator, shopkeeper] (Depestre 1979, 51). This versatility, which should prove a positive trait, is, in this fictional, inverted space, a liability, perceived as threatening the very instability that allows the “Zacharian” (read Duvalieran) system to flourish. It is rule by intimidation and fear, and those who do not succumb to either and resist are destabilizing by their very existence.

Postel, whose life is in ruins because of his convictions, and who is virtually a political prisoner though he is not jailed, nevertheless rejects exile. In a perverse display of power, his enemies prefer not to kill him, exalting in the fact that Postel is virtually withering (in the sense of losing strength and vitality as well as being rendered incapable of action), as a poor shopkeeper. This mental and physical wasting away finds a metaphor in the deforestation plaguing Haiti: « Erosion et déboisement sont à nos montagnes ce que la zombification représente pour les gens » [Erosion and deforestation are to our mountains what zombification represents for the people] (Depestre 1979, 56).

Postel’s solution to this living death, which is in effect the definition of the state of zombification, is to participate in the revival of an old tradition that had been set aside years ago. People no longer revel in the old festivals as the nightmare of the Zacharian state has overcome the citizens: “Même le carnaval, si bien ancré dans les mœurs, n’avait plus son éclat de jadis. Le mardi gras était permanent : tous ses masques étaient à l’effigie du Grand Electrificateur » [Even carnival, so deeply ingrained in the customs of the people no longer had its former luster. It was permanent Mardi Gras: all of the masks were effigies of the Grand Electrifier] (Depestre 1979, 23). It is a form of carnivalesque inversion in Bakhtinian fashion, where truth has indeed become stranger than fiction.
The hijacking of tradition is something that Depestre accuses the Duvalier regime of engaging in, and so in *Le Mât de cocagne*, Postel’s function as a force of resistance, expands into a catalyst for the setting-right of cultural symbolism, displaced by the politicization of rituals that have been taken over by a predatory regime. As one of the characters states: *La négritude zacharienne se change en tigritude* [*Zacharian negritude has changed into “tigertude”*] (Depestre 1979, 61). The reference to tigers is further à propos in light of the ferocity of the dictatorship, under which thousands died at the hands of Duvaliers Ton-Ton Macoutes (a neo-fascist militia) and thousands fled.

Postel decides that he will climb atop the greasy pole as a show of force to prove that, despite the emptiness of his life, he is not spiritually or morally defeated. His compatriots decide that the middle-aged and out-of-shape Postel will never make it without help. And so, even as he denounces any link between “magic” (echoing the disdain of non-practitioners of the Vodu religion) and liberty, « *Je n’ai pas une conception magique de la lutte pour la liberté* » [I don’t have a magical conception of the struggle for liberty], his friends undertake the task of informing him of the religion’s powerful significance in the history of Haiti and its potential in contemporary times as a catalyst for change (Depestre 1979, 35).

Of course, in a debate that relays the dominant discourse regarding such rituals, the detractors of Vodu see the climbing of the greasy pole as nothing more than a vulgar spectacle, an undertaking unfit for someone of Postel’s stature, « *Vous êtes un homme de culture...vous n’avez rien à faire sur un mât suiffé. C’est un sport pour délinquant de droit commun*”.... “et à quoi tu penses pendant ce temps? A te barbouiller de suif folklorique! A faire le clown vertical dans le vieux cirque animiste de tes ancêtres! »
[You’re a man of culture... you have no business on a greasy pole. It’s a sport for the common criminal...and what are you thinking of during this time? Of smearing yourself with folkloric lard! To play the upright clown in the old animist circus of your ancestors!]

(Depestre 1979, 47). The derisive tone is countered by the well-informed and sobering responses of one of the faithful.

It is through the figure of Sor Cisa, a Vodu priestess that Postel’s initiation into the significance of the religion in Haitian history occurs. She begins by asking questions:

“Tu es de cette île et tu ne sais pas qui est maître Loko?...Tu n’as jamais entendu non plus parler du roi Oloko-Miroir? Ni d’Azagou Loko? Ni de Loko Kisigwe Danyso?” [You are from this island and you don’t know who Master Loko is? (...) Neither have you heard talk of the king Oloko-Mirror? Nor of Azagou Loko? Nor of Loko Kisigwe Danyso?] (Depestre 1979, 67).

As in *Macunaima*, the lack of domestic cultural knowledge is presented as a cause for concern, the incredulity barely concealed. Sor Cisa functions as both the observer (the one who asks questions) and the one who answers them (the informant). She serves as a sort of double for Depestre the autoethnographer, the keeper and disseminator of cultural identity:

*Sais-tu au moins le rôle que Loko a joué dans l’histoire de cette île ? Lui, en personne, protégea Dessalines durant toutes les batailles de l’Indépendance. Le chef de la révolution est tombé dans l’embuscade du Pont-Rouge parce que, ce 17 octobre-là, Papa-Loko malheureusement n’était pas à ses côtés. Il était parti la veille en mission secrète dans le département du Sud qui conspirait. Les ennemis de général Dessalines en profitèrent pour leur abominable forfait. Simon Bolivar, lui-même, lors de son séjour à Jacmel, en 1816, grâce aux conseils de Thomas Christ et de sa sœur Sinta, sollicita aussi l’aide de Papa-*
Loko qui s’attacha à lui mieux que son ombre, dans toutes ses campagnes. C’est pourquoi Bolivar, lui, mourut dans son lit, après avoir fait tout ce qu’il avait à faire. Loko peut prendre à volonté la forme d’un caméléon, d’un oiseau grimpeur, d’un lézard, d’un papillon ou d’une ombre d’homme, de femme ou d’enfant (Depestre 1979, 69).

[Do you at least know the role that Loko played in the history of this island? He, in person, protected Dessalines during all those battles for Independence. The leader of the revolution succumbed in an ambush at Pont-Rouge because that 17th of October, unfortunately, Papa-Loko was not at his side. He had gone on a secret mission the night before in the department of the South which was conspiring. The enemies of General Dessalines took advantage for their abominable plan. Simon Bolívar, for his part, during his stay in Jacmel in 1816, thanks to the advice of Thomas Christ and his sister Sinta, also solicited the help of Papa-Loko who clung to him closer than his shadow in all of his campaigns. That’s why Bolívar died in his bed, after having done all that he had to do. Loko can take the form of a chameleon, a climbing bird, a lizard, a butterfly or the shadow of a man, a woman or child at will.]

Her knowledge is not simply an artifact, but a tool at the disposal of the resistance. By invoking the revolutionary figures Dessalines and Bolivar, Sor Cisa is making the case to Postel that he need not despair. That on the contrary, he should have faith in the gods of his ancestors in order to overcome the defeat Zachary has planned for him and that revolution is a historical continuity.

For Depestre, revolution is inextricably tied to Vodu, going back to the ceremony that took place in Bois Caïman, an event that started the Saint Domingue revolt in earnest. By showing that Postel is ignorant of the loas, the writer is insisting that a lack of knowledge of Vodu is an incomplete knowledge of Haitian history. Depestre is engaging in a reeducation of his compatriots, particularly those for whom the Catholic Church’s intervention alienated from those who still practice Vodu and know the Revolution’s oral
history. It is a delicate balancing act, as Depestre also attempts to revoke the sinister implications that the Duvalier regime endowed to the religion, while addressing the psychic blow to the collective psyche of the Haitian people dealt by the dictatorship.

### Navigating a Confounding Utopian/Dystopian Universe of Signs

Andrade and Depestre, both extremely well-versed in the folklore of their respective countries, strategized using that element in their respective work to expand the significance of that folklore in pointing out national particularity. Their interrogation of culture moves beyond attempts at realistic representation to engage in a questioning of the term itself as the following citations on Andrade and Depestre respectively attest:

As a mulatto, Mario [sic] de Andrade quite literally embodied the ethnic diversity of what Gilberto Freyre called a “mestizo” nation. An anthropologist and musicologist as well as poet and novelist, Mario [sic] de Andrade compiled Amerindian, Luso-Brazilian, and African legends to create the novel *Macunaima*, [sic] calling his text a “rhapsody” in the musical sense of a “free fantasy on an epic, heroic or national theme.” Even the language of the novel is syncretic, constituting what Andrade himself called a “veritable Esperanto” which taps the multiethnic linguistic genius of Brazilian Portuguese, fusing its Indianisms and its Africanisms, its legends and songs and slang into a panfolkloric saga (Stam 1988, 110).

Depestre…. goes beyond the works of the Indigenist movement. He is rooted in his national heritage, yet at the same time he transcends it. Seeking to join forces with world movements in revolutionary poetry, he creates a literature which is indigenous, but endows it with universal implications….Depestre evokes Voodoo’s inherent and essential nature even while he dynamically revolutionizes it…He is an “engaged” Marxist; his poetic creation cannot stand apart from the social and political situation, the external factors surrounding him (Dayan 1971, iv-viii).
Each author engages a mode of storytelling that exemplifies what Mascia-Lees calls “Interpretive anthropology’s focus on thick description, multivocality, polysemy, richness, and texture…” (Mascia-Lees 687). To this end, Andrade’s *Macunaíma* and Depestre’s *Le Mât de Cocagne* offer the possibility of different readings which are dependent upon the reader’s historical, social, cultural, political, literary and linguistic knowledge of the society depicted. Much will appear bizarre to a reader of *Macunaíma* who is unfamiliar with the myths of Brazil’s indigenous peoples; one who knows nothing of Duvalier’s “noiriste” doctrine (an extreme expression of Négritude and Price-Mars’s Africanist discourse), will not appreciate the nuances of the characterizations in the novel. As Clifford further states: “[C]ulture is a serious collective fiction (Mascia-Lees 686).” The more the reader (or spectator) is able to recognize elements, the greater the impact on the collectivity (and universality) of the fiction. As Maria Lourdes Teodoro observes, what unites the writer of regionalist literature with those of the modern novels in both Haiti and Brazil is the idea of rupture, of discontinuity even within the domain of intertextuality and progression: “*Les deux mouvements littéraires – Moderniste et Négritude – inaugurent un discours de rupture avec le passé, par une prise de conscience à la fois de leur réalité biologique et de leur réalité culturelle...* [The two literary movements – Modernism and Negritude – inaugurate a discourse of rupture with the past by a simultaneous recognition of their biological and cultural reality] (Lourdes Teodoro 97).

Depestre’s and Andrade’s studies in ethnography and their prolific reading of the foremost researchers of the human sciences is well documented and commented upon in their own works as well as in that of their biographers and critics. Both writers engage in
critical readings of the works of such regional scholars studying culture in the Americas, as Ortiz, Herskovits, Freyre, among others, well aware of the nuance between traditional anthropology and the autoethnographer. Both writers engage in a dialogical poetics of engagement and refusal and take their cues from a multitude of sources and utilizing their travels to comparative ends.

The common interest in poetry, with its capacity for dense expression, is but one aspect that invites a comparative study of the *oeuvre* of Depestre and that of Andrade. It is the modality of choice for both authors, and according to Lourdes Teodoro, for the Brazilian Modernist and Antillean Négritude writers in general: « *La poésie est au départ la forme d’expression privilégié chez les écrivains modernistes et chez les écrivains de la Négritude francophone antillaise ; le privilège du langage poétique (comme les textes théoriques le démontrent) ne s’explique pas simplement parce que la poésie est considérée comme un genre noble, comme le veut Micelli, mais par le fait que par elle il semble possible d’accomplir cette récupération de soi-même » [From the start, poetry is the privileged form of expression for the Modernists and the Francophone Antillean Négritude writers; the privileging of poetic language cannot simply be explained because poetry is considered a noble genre, as Micelli posits, but by the fact that through it, it seems possible to accomplish the recuperation of oneself] (Lourdes Teodoro 128).

The influence of Surrealism in Haiti and Futurism in Brazil, with their irreverent disregard for tradition and with their intentional politicization of the arts, their subversive tendencies and a certain affinity with autoethnography, is evident in the work of the two writers as is the strong presence of eroticism. The interspersal of unbelievable, “magical” happenings with historical events, the lack of chapters and dream-like sequences in *Le
Mât de cocagne. hearken to Surrealism. The Futurist fascination with the machine, with progress, with dynamism manifests itself overtly in *Macunaima* and reflects Mário de Andrade’s conceptualization of art “...why he once wrote in the margin of a journal: ‘The work of art is a machine for producing emotional tumult’” (Suárez & Tomlins 61).

The Modernist project in Brazil was tightly bound to the quest for self-knowledge, a necessary element in the effort toward progress:

*Modernismo = modernização + conscientização nacional. O Brasil ajustando as lentes para melhor olhar-se a si mesmo. Do modernismo nasceram as bases contemporâneas da auto-estima brasileira. O afeto multirracial [sic], a idéia de uma cultura brasileira popular como bem a ser preservado e vetor determinante de nossa identidade são princípios que as diversas tendências modernistas desde o início agitaram, sistematizaram e finalmente oficializaram, ao longo de um precurso que levou do momento renovador, reformador, iconoclastico dos anos 20, ao momento de consagração pedagógica e cívica nos anos 40-50 (Moriconi 2002, 26).*

[Modernism = modernization + national consciousness-raising. Brazil adjusted its lenses to see itself better. The contemporary bases of Brazilian self esteem were born of Modernism. The multiracial aspect, the idea of a Brazilian popular culture as being worthy of preservation and determining factor of our identity are principles that diverse modernist tendencies agitated from the beginning, systematizing and finally making official, from the precursors that arose from the reforming iconoclastic renewal of the 20s to the time of the pedagogical and civic consecration in the 1940s and 1950s.]

The raising of consciousness, be it artistic, political or moral, is a dominating and daunting project in the early part of the twentieth century for Brazil (and as we have seen, for Haiti as well). The theorizing of national identity and cultural foundations in a postcolonial context is an integral part of Andrade’s and Depestre’s preoccupations as the
latter makes clear: « L’indépendance politique n’entraîne pas une décolonisation spontanée des structures morales, psychiques, culturelles héritées de l’époque coloniale. Cet héritage sinistre peut congeler pendant très longtemps les forces de création et de connaissance d’une société » [Political independence does not bring about a spontaneous decolonisation of the moral, psychological, cultural structures inherited from the colonial period. This sinister heritage may freeze the creative forces and knowledge of a society for quite a long time.] (Depestre 252).

The inventive use of language is an element that seeps into the prose works of Depestre and Andrade. The preoccupation with it is two-fold: an attempt at capturing an “authentic” voice that reflects the local vernacular while searching for a literary language that is nonconformist and non-derivative within the parameters of linguistic heritage. Beyond this is the desire to plumb the depths of the notion of cultural identity. In this effort, language is a tool at the disposal of the writer who uses it in the service of the population in the forging of a national character; a way of exposing cultural identity to the outside world, while at the same time truly revealing it only to the initiated, those willing to move beyond the superficiality of travelogues, or the remnants of a discourse based on mimicry. In this manner, the texts transcend the narrative and become references where one can seek out the workings of a code where a deeper significance is at work.

Yet travel is an integral part of the work of the two writers and ironically helps to shape their use of language. It is during a trip to the Northeast and the Amazon that Mário de Andrade conceives of Macunaíma, after happening upon an anthropological study of the indigenous tribes of the Guyanas and Northern Amazonia undertaken by Koch-
Grünberg. He undertakes to return several times to engage in research. Andrade scholars Suárez and Tomlins recount the genesis of the work:

In 1925, Mário’s friend and fellow poet, Luís Aranha, gave him a copy of Capistrano de Abreu’s Rã-txa-hu-ni-kui-i: *The Language of the Caxinaúá Indians of the Ibuacu River, Tributary of the Muru*...In the following year Mário got to know Theodor Koch-Grünberg’s *From the Roraima to the Orinoco*...the second volume of which contains a collection of Amerindian legends compiled by the German ethnographer around 1911. A prominent character in the legends was Makunaíma, whom Mário was soon to convert into his “hero of our people” (“herói de nossa gente”). Beyond Capistrano de Abreu and Koch-Grünberg, Mário was extending his serious studies of folklore through his readings of von den Steinen, Barbosa Rodrigues, the collector of popular tales Lindolfo Gomes, Couto de Magalhães (author of *The Savage* [*O selvagem*]), the ethnographer Carlos Teschauer (who studies the customs of the extreme south of Brazil in Rio Grande do Sul)...[I]n all this mass of folkloric, historic, and the ethnographic research, the writer’s imagination was especially caught by Koch-Grünberg’s recording of the deeds [of] this Indian hero; faithfully following Koch-Grünberg’s outline of the hero’s deeds, the Brazilian writer converted him into an antihero, Macunaíma...and thus amalgamated all his folkloric knowledge in one poetic tale (Suárez & Tomlins 96).

*Macunaíma* and *Le Mât de Cocagne* accommodate varying levels of understanding. Both works utilize unorthodox linguistic repertoires in an effort to more closely approximate the local variety of the colonial language, imbued with African and autochthonous elements, taking into account the elasticity of languages in contact. Depestre and Andrade, both students of ethnography, operate within linguistic systems where a chasm exists between the local vernacular and the inherited language.

In the case of Haiti, French and Haitian Creole are the two extremes of a linguistic continuum, making the usage of “Haitian French” very elastic and non-uniform among
the different segments of the population. Depending upon several factors which affect the amount of contact one has with continental or Haitian French, the degree of fluency and the level of richness will vary. Jean Jonassaint points to the difficulty that exists in establishing the parameters distinguishing Haitian French from metropolitan French from the hexagon:

En fait, il n’y a pas toujours consensus sur ce qui est ou n’est pas de l’ordre du français haïtien, car il est difficile d’établir la frontière entre français haïtien et haïtien : tout mot du français est potentiellement un mot haïtien, et vice versa…entre l’haïtien et le français, les frontières lexicographiques ne sont pas toujours étanches. Certains mots haïtiens sont des archaïsmes français de « la langue classique » entre autres…[d]’autres sont des mots français qui ont gardé en Haïti…des sens anciens qui n’ont plus cours en France… (Jonaissant 107).

[In fact, there is not always consensus on what is or is not of the order of Haitian French, as it is difficult to establish the border between Haitian French and Haitian [Creole]: any French word is potentially a Haitian word and vice versa...between Haitian and French, the lexical boundaries are not always impenetrable. Certain Haitian words are archaic French words from the “classic age” or other periods...others are French words which in Haiti have kept their old meaning, that no longer have the same usage in France...]

Though Brazil’s linguistic situation is distinct from that of Haiti (several scholars have determined a diglossic coexistence between French and Haitian; others find the term inadequate), Brazilian Portuguese had evolved enough from the continental variety as to warrant the interest of the Modernists. Roger Bastide views this appeal as central to Mário de Andrade’s text : « Dans [Macunaíma, de Andrade] se livrera à la constitution d’une langue brésilienne, qui ne soit pas une simple coexistence de dialectes, une juxtaposition de vocabulaires hétérogènes ou de traits syntaxiques, mais une construction
[In Macunaíma, Andrade will dedicate himself to the constitution of a Brazilian language, which is not a simple coexistence of dialects, a juxtaposition of heterogeneous vocabularies or syntactic traits, but a systematic construction of a unique language, defining Brazilian in opposition to Portuguese] (Bastide 1965, 543). Depestre’s task is quite different, as he is writing in French and not Haitian creole; his effort is not to construct a unique language.

Each author reaches beyond the parameters of mere story-telling to present the complex rapport between written language and oral traditions. It is not lost on either writer that a national literature, if it is to be regarded as such, must reflect what is truly unique about that nation’s culture. As Edward Said states: “Self-definition is one of the activities practiced by all cultures: it has a rhetoric, a set of occasions and authorities (national feasts, for example, times of crisis, founding fathers, basic texts, and so on), and a familiarity all its own” (Said 1993, 37). However, both texts are also dealing with the unfamiliarity of their readership, and in a gesture of accommodation, there are metatextual elements included in the works. Explanatory footnotes pepper both Macunaíma and Le Mât de Cocagne, a glossary of terms is included in Eros dans un train chinois. Macunaíma and Le Mât de Cocagne both cede the omnipresent narrator’s voice to a second narrator through the mechanism of a letter. In Andrade’s text, it is the eponymous protagonist who takes over and in Depestre’s novel, the letter voices the thoughts of one of the characters in the text, Zaza Valéry, who addresses the poet as “My dear poet and brother” (Mât de cocagne 170). The epistolary form provides the authors a further means of engaging a discourse at once historic and ethnographic. Valéry reveals
herself as a source for the story of Postel (an informant) and tells the poet (he is pointedly never referred to as a *romancier* or novelist), not to hesitate in measuring her subjectivity.

The issue of language figures in the efforts of both writers in exploring national culture; however this is only one aspect in their endeavors. What they achieve is a ludic, verbal show-and-tell, a game of hide-and-seek laden with symbols for deciphering; in this also their work exhibits a certain affinity. A superficial reading of *Macunaíma* can lead one to identify the work as a flight of fancy, a precursor to Marvelous Realism, a surreal exercise worthy of Rabelais, presenting us a world replete with satire, populated by giants and a hero on a nebulous quest for what he lacks (an identifiable character). A reader with even a little knowledge of the Haitian cultural and political landscape will understand that oppression is a theme of *Le Mât de cocagne* yet may be oblivious to what a knowledgeable reader will find to be a transparent allusion to Duvalier and his brand of fascism.

Suárez and Tomlins make the following cogent assertion regarding *Macunaíma*, one that is also valid for *Le Mât de cocagne*: “The instrumentality of language must invite the reader into the game of decipherment, the intellectual adventure of understanding” (Suárez & Tomlins 200). In this game, Andrade and Depestre demonstrate their talent for wordplay and their uncanny ability to reveal and obscure at once. The more superficial one’s interest in Haiti or Brazil, the less evident the significance of the cultural elements in *Le Mât de cocagne* or *Macunaíma*. A true appreciation of the contents of each of the works demands knowledge of local history, ethnography, regional folklore, syncretic religion, autochthonous mythology, political circumstance and social mores. The deeper the reader’s knowledge of these points, the
richer and less esoteric each text becomes. Both works are illustrative of Edouard Glissant’s dichotomy of opacity/transparency. For Glissant, opacity is a strategy upon which writers from the developing world depend in order to safeguard their particularity vis-à-vis an increasingly industrialized world that insists on defining them in a reductive transparency that is easily “read” and therefore devoid of complexity and depth. Andrade and Depestre relish in the complexity of their work, where genres are fused. This is a strategy that has certainly survived the decades separating their work.

Folklore, myth, history and religion are highlighted because of their particular admixture in the “New World.” And where the Regionalist/Indigenist novel seeks out a utopian existence in a harsh environment (addressed in the previous chapter), *Macunaima* and *Le Mât de cocagne* are rather dystopian in their outlook. The protagonists of these works inhabit a world laden with perils, brutality and self-interest. The earthly paradise is revealed to be mined with man-made traps where greed, violence and racism are the corrupting evils that belie and mar the beauty of the tropical landscape.

Paradoxically, the readership is not the majority of the population. The high illiteracy rates in Brazil at the time that Andrade was writing and in Haiti throughout the years, ensure that the works are for the consumption of members of the upper class, intellectuals, literate foreigners and perhaps, as Yanick Lahens and Maria Lourdes de Teodoro posit, future generations.52 Eminent scholar Roger Bastide points out that in the case of Brazil, «*Mario ne pouvait écrire que pour l’élite, le peuple du Brésil étant*
composé d’analphabètes et de semi-analphabètes ». [Mário could not help but to write for the elite, the Brazilian people being comprised of illiterates and semi-literates] (Bastide 1965, 544).

The influence of French literature is a cultural aspect of tremendous force both in Haiti and Brazil from which Depestre and Andrade determine to extricate themselves, or at the very least, to cannibalize and make their own, in the theoretical sense that Oswald de Andrade articulates anthropofagia. In effect, the works are meant to participate in the debate regarding the limits and potential of ethnography and autoethnography; Depestre and Andrade are also writing for their scholarly peers, as the following citation from Depestre will attest:

[Le regard ethnologique s’est limité le plus souvent à devoir, parfois brillamment, les mythologies, les systèmes de parenté, les préjugés raciaux, la littérature orale, les mœurs sexuelles et culinaires, les créations musicales et artistiques, les éternels folklores, sans jamais bien montrer les rapports historiques qui existent entre le colonialisme et tout ce creuset original et contradictoire de cultures et de civilisations. Où sont-ils, les anthropologues ou les ethnologues qui ont eu l’idée de faire du terrain dans les conseils d’administration des banques et des bourses néocoloniales ? Où est l’anthropologie des institutions économiques et politiques, des mécanismes pseudo-juridiques…53

[The ethnographic gaze has most often limited itself to unveil, at times brilliantly, the mythologies, kinship systems, racial prejudices, oraliture, sexual mores and culinary tastes, musical and artistic creation, ever-present folklore, without ever really looking at this original and contradictory crucible of cultures and of civilizations. Where are they, the anthropologists or ethnologists who had the idea to break ground on the board of directors of neocolonial banks and stock exchanges? Where is the

53 René Depestre « Bonjour et adieu à la négritude suivi de travaux d’identité » Seghers
Each writer is heavily engaged in the debate on national culture, participating as much in the critique as in the creation of our understanding of the inherent difficulties in fashioning culture, as though it were something capable of being inscribed and once delineated, remains immutable. Even those elements that remain constant are subject to recoding once the context changes, as we have seen with the figure of the cangaceiro in the previous chapter.

Geertz coined the term “thick description” to describe the inherent layers of meaning that exist in the interpretation of cultural phenomena. The observer’s understanding of the symbolism on display is wholly dependent on that individual’s depth of knowledge of the culture under investigation, on the level of forthrightness the ethnographer is able to elicit from informants. In the cases of Depestre and Andrade, both highly vested in ethnography, their understanding of the power of representation informs their work and moves it beyond the mere recounting of feasts, ceremonies or the recitation of folkloric tales. Utilizing their intimate knowledge of their respective societies from an ethnographic standpoint, Andrade and Depestre explore and synthesize various facets of the characteristics that make up their theoretical understanding of culture in order to expand our understanding of certain traits. By bringing together disparate elements and genres, the two writers avoid any semblance of mimicry.

On another level, however, their works reflect the refusal of any attempt at easy, ascribed cohesiveness. Depestre and Andrade reject the facile characterizations that essentialize nationality just as they decline the possibility of a generic type for each of
these two works, preferring instead to adapt a social construct, syncretism, to their literary styles. With the characters in *Macunaima* and in *Le Mât de cocagne* Depestre and Andrade each repudiate the personified nationalist emblem. The shifting genres within the texts reinforce the futility of attempting to fix cultural identity. The subtleties of innovation found in the linguistic modifications work in tandem with the efforts of each other to seek an individual voice that straddles the use of local vernacular and a more formalized inherited coinage that reaches a wider audience.

In deciding what to include in a text, the author initially functions as observer in the editorializing of the transcription of symbolic events (the choice of representative elements found in the written work) and finally playing the role of informant to the reader’s observer, the ultimate consumer of this cultural exchange. The possibilities of engagement on the part of the reader are thus based on a series of variables that are not limited to the content of the text. What distinguishes the application of ethnographic method in the *Macunaima* and *Le Mât de cocagne* from the use of ethnography in the *Romance Regionalista* and the *Roman Indigéniste*, is precisely this open-ended question of decoding in the former texts. Whereas the novels of the Regionalists and Indigenists provide a closed set of meanings to the reader in explicatory fashion, there is a complex rapport between the text and the reader in the work of Depestre and Andrade. Demands are made on the audience of *Macunaima* and *Le Mat de cocagne* that do not exist for the consumer of the works in chapter two. These last two works are closer in this regard to the films that appear in the following chapter, which in their use of ethnography and given the nature of the viewing experience, also challenge the spectator in ways that the *Roman Indigéniste* and the *Romance Regionalista* do not.
Chapter IV: Ethnofictions or the Space between Documentary and Narrative Cinema

“Cultures” do not hold still for their portraits. 54
– James Clifford

Chapter four represents a shift of focus within the parameters of ethnopoetics. We move from the literary anthropology of the previous two chapters into the realm of the visual. The works discussed here appear decades later than the first articulations of Price-Mars and Ramos yet are, I believe, a continuation of the attempts to explore the modes and possibilities of cultural representation. In my view, the works featured in this chapter serve to interrogate the legacy of the autoethnography (either directly or indirectly) of Price-Mars and Ramos in the filmmakers’s own conceptualizations of ethnopoetics and their experimentations with visual anthropology and narrative cinema. It also looks at how postmodern ethnography has influenced the notion of cinematic genre, challenging the expectations of what an ethnographic film looks like as well as the demands that it makes on spectatorship.

As we have seen in the previous chapters, autoethnography is an undertaking that requires an awareness of the possibilities and limitations of traditional ethnography. The autoethnographer is intimately aware that the position of the Self in relation to the Other is not one of opposites but rather that of a shifting interplay between inside/outside. This rapport encompasses an understanding of the multiplicity of the self and the complexity of truly exploring the limits of perceiving the Other. Postmodern ethnographers are also cognizant of this asymmetrical movement, allowing for the self-referential moments, the

54 James Clifford (1986, 10)
intertextual allusions and the generic *bricolage* evident in some of the films. For example, Nelson Pereira dos Santos’s *Como era gostoso o meu francês*, an autoethnographic narrative work, and Jac Avila’s postmodernist bricolage *Krik?Krat!* both exhibit such tendencies, despite formally belonging to different genres (the first being a narrative film and the second a documentary), pertaining to the filmography of separate cultures and emerging from diverse perspectives.

In his article “Post-Modern Ethnography: From Document of the Occult to Occult Document,” anthropologist Stephen Tyler writes “Post-modern ethnography does not practice synthesis within the text” (Tyler 132). The aim of the post-modern text (whether written or visual) is not to reconcile the fragments which construct the whole; nor is it obligatory that any attempted assemblage of the parts will culminate in a resolution. This is a significant shift in the evolution of ethnographic method and is, I believe, a point of convergence for contemporary narrative and documentary cinemas that attempt to treat the notion of culture in a meaningful way. Whereas the ethnographic monograph counts on limited readership, film in general enjoys an immense potential audience. This type of ethnographic film allows spectators to create meaning based upon their understanding of the elements provided in the filmmaker’s composition.

Considering the innovations of ethnography as a practice allows us to look at the relationships that the films in this chapter (with a range of dates from the 1940s to the 1990s) have to the works in the previous two. I purposely avoid adaptations such as the film versions of *Vidas Secas*, *Macunaima* or *Cumbite* (Cuban filmmaker Gutierrez Aléas’s interpretation of *Gouverneurs de la rosée*), as it involves incorporating a further set of parameters. Adaptations would also likely lend themselves too easily to facile
arguments regarding any similarities to the written texts. I prefer to focus instead on the manner in which the films relate to each other and to the works in the previous chapters thematically and structurally and what they bring to the historical debates regarding signification in the contexts of ethnography, genre and spectatorship.

Though intimately tied to twentieth century developments of anthropological representation, film has its own history, its own traditions, and its own language that filmmakers study, master and expand upon. Despite a limited, though evolving set of applicable techniques, film seems to have an endless capability of reinventing itself. As such, our understanding of what film is and what it does is also under constant review.

Film theory has given rise to a number of conceptualizations including (but not limited to and in no particular order), Stanley Cavell’s articulations of an ontology of the cinematic world, Gilles Deleuze’s meditations on cinematic time, Christian Metz’s interrogations of film language and semiotics, Sergei Eisenstein’s conceptualization of montage and Dziga Vertov’s insistence on a functional, non-fiction cinema. Some of the most important innovations of cinematic representation for the purposes of this study are the works of Jean Rouch, one of the instigators of Cinéma Vérité.

In the middle of the last century, French filmmaker Jean Rouch’s formulation and practice of shared anthropology is a further recognition of the limitations of the observer, an acknowledgment that leads the filmmaker to seek out the “object’s” subjective interpretation of the captured images. As Lutkehaus and Cool point out, Rouch’s oeuvre represents the post-modernist “rejection of the anthropological paradigm that posited the omnipotent authority of the ethnographic observer vis-à-vis his or her distanced object of observation . . . [Rouch’s work focused on] . . . nontraditional ethnographic subjects such
as migration, urbanization and indigenous responses to colonialism in West Africa” (Lutkehaus & Cool 118). The recognition of traditional anthropology’s limitations provoked a far-reaching reconceptualization in the understanding of ethnographic filmmaking for Rouch. It also fostered a radicalization in his views of how ethnographic filmmaking should be done. The dialogic nature of cultural formation, which is not fixed, but responds to forces internal and external, is what permits Rouch to develop new, unorthodox formulations in his approach to ethnographic film. The apport of Rouch’s conjoining of ethnography and fiction forces one to consider the interface between anthropology and film. Rouch was among the first to decry the supposed objectivity of the ethnographic film and to acknowledge the fact that the camera was in fact an obtrusive, if necessary, presence.

The interest of Rouch’s work for this sort of project lies in the hybrid nature of his cinematic production which on the whole, conforms neither to the scientific rigors of traditional ethnography nor to the aesthetic conventions of narrative cinema. Rouch’s work represents a lifetime of experimentation aimed at synthesizing the seeming polarity between fiction and reality. The interplay between real life and staged drama, as captured on screen by Rouch, results in a variety of configurations; Cinéma-vérité, direct cinema, shared anthropology, psychodrama, ethnofiction, cine-trance, are all part of the filmmaker’s repertoire and represent influential innovations in cinematic production (Rouch 2003, 5).

55 Rouch, defines these as (a) “Cinéma-vérité…a process, visual aesthetic, and technology of cinema…came to mean four things: (1) films composed of first take, nonstaged, non-theatrical, conscripted material; (2) nonactors doing what they do in natural, spontaneous settings; (3) use of lightweight, handheld portable synchronous-sound equipment; and (4) handheld on-the-go interactive filming and recording techniques with little if any artificial lighting.” (b) Shared anthropology…the most basic method involved is feedback (which Rouch translates as contredon audiovisuel, or audiovisual reciprocity, playing on the French, as well on Le Don, the title of Marcel Mauss’s celebrated 1925 classic The Gift).
Carlos Diegues (Brazil) and Nelson Perreira Dos Santos (Brazil), Rouch’s “suturing” of documentary and narrative cinema provides an expansive and elastic framework for discussing a type of representation that defies the rigid limits of what is traditionally understood with regard to each genre. His goal of getting at the “truth” of the visual experience was an effort to force the spectator to extricate himself or herself from preconceived notions, to search beneath the surface and plumb the depths of human experience, both universal and particular.

The films discussed here all play upon our perception of truth and representation; the notions of reliability, historical accuracy and myth and the ability of film to engage our senses in the viewing experience combine to create a world that becomes present to us, even if only partially so. The filmmaker’s vision is thus only part of the resultant connection to the spectator, who on a personal level, will respond to a film at various levels. No two reactions will be identical at all of these levels particularly since, as Rothman states in The “I” of the Camera, “movies address matters of intimacy and do so in a language of indirectness and silence” (Rothman 1988, 9). With regard to the question of viewership, although related to the issue of readership discussed in the previous chapters, film has the advantage of easy access, at least when it comes to sensory perception. Visual and musical cues reinforce the filmmaker’s attempts at controlling the message, but ultimately, spectators will respond based upon their own experiences.

The films presented here also take part in the evolution of cinema history, reflecting innovations and tendencies taking place elsewhere, though not always concurrently. A caveat that must be stated at the outset is that cinema in Brazil predates the Regionalist literary movement by several decades, a long history that began only
seven months after “the first demonstration to a paying audience of the Lumières’ "Cinématographe in the Salon Indien, a basement room of the Grand Café in Paris, on 28 December 1895” (Parkinson 16). In July of 1896 an Italian emigrating to Brazil from Europe, Afonso Segreto, began filming images of Rio’s Guanabara Bay from the ship Brésil upon his arrival. By 1908, the first narrative films began to appear, facilitated by the arrival of electricity to Rio de Janeiro in the previous year. With this innovation, projection houses began to proliferate with 18 inaugurated between August and September of 1907 alone! The first sound film in Brazil, Luiz de Barros’s Acabaram-se os ótarios, debuted in 1929 (Moreno 1994, 15-25, 55). The decade of the 1930’s is when Brazil’s first major studios emerge: Cinédia and Atlântida. In 1932 Gétulio Vargas instituted the first law specific to cinema and censorship and the Instituto Nacional de Cinema Educativo was created in 1936 (Moreno 75-85).

In contrast to this, Haitian cinematic production is posterior to the Mouvement Indigéniste which had long since become part of the Haitian psyche. Ricardo Widmaier established the first film studio in Haiti in 1946, Citadel Films, which produced newsreels (Peck 2001). The first documentary and feature films both appeared several years later in 1962. Due to its late and sparing inclusion on the world cinema scene, one is hard-pressed to speak of a “Haitian Cinema.” One cannot point to its longevity, nor name any cinematic movements; indeed, one is hard-pressed to speak of a Haitian cinema at all. The representation of Haiti in American films (both explicitly and implicitly), precedes domestic production by several decades. One of the first documentaries on Haiti is Maya Deren’s Divine Horsemen, (which I discuss further in this chapter); Deren filmed
sequences over the course of several trips to Haiti beginning in 1946 and the footage was edited posthumously after Deren’s death.

Haiti continues to be of interest to filmmakers from other nations. American filmmaker Jonathan Demme’s *The Agronomist* is a film about Haitian journalist Jean Dominique, but it is also an interrogation of Haitian culture. In *Krik?Krak!* Bolivian-born filmmaker Jac Avila demonstrates the interplay of documentary and narrative modes of dramatization to be found in some post-modern ethnographic film and Frenchman Laurent Cantet’s film adaptation of Haitian-born writer Dany Laferrière’s short studies, *Vers le sud* (*Heading South*) is a modern day exploration of the intersections between exoticism, poverty and the phenomenon of sex tourism.

Digital filmmaking and portable DVD cameras have provided a boon to enterprising Haitian filmmakers who would otherwise have difficulty finding equipment or funding for even the lowest-budget cinema. The straight-to-dvd films have a dependable market throughout the Haitian diaspora. Co-productions between what Gabriel Teshome considers Third Cinema (coming from developing countries) and industrialized nations or independent productions are the predominant arrangement for Haitian-born filmmakers such as Claudette Coulanges, Laurence Magloire and certainly the most important filmmaker to come from the Caribbean nation: Raoul Peck. In the case of Haiti, one is forced to ask to what extent these collaborations either expand or limit what we speak of when we say Haitian cinema.

In writing this chapter, I also bear in mind the historical evolution in conceptualizations about documentary and narrative cinemas and our understanding of the traditionally accepted (and quite often challenged) neat separation between the two
genres, with one characterized as fact and the other as fiction. The idea behind
documentary cinema appears, on the surface, a rather simple one: the unbiased recording
of an object of study; an unvarnished “document” that purports to simply witness, register
and convey. Film scholar Charles Warren elaborates on the history of this
conceptualization of the genre:

In the 1930s there was consolidated in Britain and the
United States the idea of documentary film as a sort of
social truth-telling, an educational project….The thirties
gave us the documentary as it is commonly thought of, and
many viewers have never shaken off the idea, despite the
radical, deviant – in these terms – artistic work in
nonfiction that has gone on through the decades (Warren
1996, 7).

The generic category belies the vast array of methodological and conceptual approaches
to the genre, as we shall see in this chapter, where multiple techniques are utilized and
where the lines between fiction and nonfiction are blurred. Documentaries conform to the
vision of filmmakers making them as much the product of an individual’s worldview as
narrative films. Documentary cinema has not escaped the polemical debates regarding the
premises of ethnographic objectivity. Questions regarding ideology and impartiality arise
not only in relation to the filmmaker’s approach to subject matter and handling of the
topic, but with respect to spectatorship and film criticism as well.

Linked to this debate is the notion of the veracity of the documentary and its
ambitions at obtaining a purported truth, is the idea of a narrative cinema that aspires to
reflect reality. In “Feature Films as Cultural Documents” John Weakland poses the
question: “What sort of cultural documents are [feature] films and what significance can
they have for cultural anthropology?” (Weakland 1995, 44). Narrative cinema is of
cultural relevance to the extent that it focuses our attention on the particular elements that filmmakers choose to film and the ways in which they disseminate their subject. Cinematic movements are important cultural tendencies as they embrace innovative modes and techniques of articulating representation and have the capacity to be absorbed and integrated into local film vernaculars. Such trends are very telling, as they provoke thoughtful interaction and afford us the opportunity to extricate those elements that are of particular significance for a specific culture from those that are part of a larger cinematic movement. This is something that concerns both narrative and documentary cinema as filmmakers in either genre attempt to portray an interpretation of reality from a distinct point of view, a personal vision that inevitably permeates their compositions. Carlos Diegues discusses this notion of the real as it concerns film:

> Cinema is not the reproduction of reality. It implies the creation of a parallel, alternative, and verisimilar universe. This verisimilitude nourishes itself more on the spirit and ideology of the spectator than on his or her daily experience (Johnson 1984, 53).

In this conceptualization, it is not quotidian events or routines alone that frame our understanding of the world we encounter on the screen, but a shared collectivity of happenings inscribed in the spectator’s imaginary that allows us to relate to a specific world view.

In the following pages are ethnographic and autoethnographic works typically found in distinct sections of film categories: under documentary cinema one would find Jac Avila’s *Krik? Krak!*, Raoul Peck’s *Désoumen: Dialogue with Death*, Maya Deren’s *Divine Horsemen*, *Haiti: Kom sa te dweye (Haiti As it Might Have Been)*, while narrative
cinema would be the heading for Nelson Perreira dos Santos’s *Como Era Gostoso o meu Francês*, Carlos Diegues’s *Quilombo* and Anselmo Duarte’s *O Pagador de Promessas*.

Perhaps one is immediately struck by the fact that the film genres chosen in this section are also split along national lines. The documentaries focus on Haiti while the narrative films are Brazilian. In no way do the films chosen indicate that a Brazilian documentary or a Haitian narrative film would have been out of place in this discussion. I felt, however, that looking at the prevailing genres, the reasons for generic predominence and the ways that the films function, were important cultural indicators. Cantet’s *Vers le sud* (*Heading South*) would be an appropriate narrative film for this discussion. I do not include it here, however, because it adds yet another dimension in cultural representation, involving a discourse of exoticism that has as much to do with historical relations between France, the U.S. and Haiti, as it does about power relations dependent on the economic effects of globalization, race and class, men and women.

An extension of the insistence upon agency and self-definition that marked the literary movements of the previous decades, the development of *Cinema Novo* as a cinematic style in Brazil has a direct filiation with the autoethnographic texts of the 1930s and more particularly with the Regionalist works. One immediate result was a series of adaptations of the works of the authors we have seen in chapters two and three: Lima Barreto’s film *O Cangaceiro*, which treats the same subject as Rachel de Queiroz’s play, appeared in 1953. Nelson Pereira dos Santos filmed Graciliano Ramos’s *Vidas Secas* (1938) in 1963. Anselmo Duarte adapted Dias Gomes’s theatrical play *O Pagador de Promessas* (1959) and went on to win the Palme d’Or at the Cannes Film Festival in 1962. The film version of *Macunaima* (1928), directed by Joaquim Pedro de Andrade
appeared as late as 1969. Carlos Diegues’s first feature film (and his first that treats the topic of Brazil’s slave history) is based on the eponymously titled novel *Ganga Zumba* (1962). Walter Lima Jr.’s film version of José Lins do Rego’s *Menino de Engenho* [Plantation Boy] (1932), was brought to the screen in 1966 and we can certainly see a conceptual filiation between Pereira dos Santos’s *Como era Gostoso o Meu Francês* (1971) and Oswald de Andrade’s “*Manifesto da Anthropofagia*” of 1928.²⁶

I use this brief list to show that despite the years, the influence of the autoethnographic project of scholars such as Ramos, Carneiro, Price-Mars and others is of value in both synchronic and diachronic studies of cultural identity. In the case of Brazil, the novelists’s appropriations of ethnographic method set an example that the filmmakers then explored in the film medium. Indeed Nelson Pereira dos Santos filmed documentaries of Brazil’s northeastern region prior to undertaking his adaptation of *Vidas Secas* (Cárdenas & Tessier, 1972, 62). As with the temporal gulf between *Macunaima* and *Le Mât de Cocagne*, explored in chapter three, the span between the writings of Price-Mars and Ramos and the films chosen for study here are part of what I perceive as a continuum; what they have in common with the works studied in the previous chapters is the insistent quest for alternate ways of representing culture, the challenges they pose to what is understood as ethnography and the blurring of the lines between fact and fiction. This synthesis is not a new phenomenom in the world of film. We find it in American filmmaker Flaherty’s *Nanook of the North*, some of Jean Rouch’s

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²⁶ Oswald de Andrade (no relation to Mário), was a Brazilian modernist poet who recoded or reconceptualized the idea of artistic cannibalization: *antropofagia* posited that rather than merely eating the Other, the Other becomes an integral part of the cannibal through the process of digestion, it is a theoretical articulation of synthesis.
films and the cinema of post-World War II Italy, for example in the Neorealist work of Vittorio da Sica.

Indeed Nelson Pereira dos Santos credits Italian Neorealism with providing the inspiration to Brazilian filmmakers for conceiving of a new way of making movies: «Sans le néo-réalisme, nous n’aurions jamais commencé [...] de faire du cinéma sans studios, avec ‘une caméra à la main, et une bonne idée derrière’, immergés dans notre réalité, y puisant nos thèmes les plus importants, qui justifiaient notre existence d’hommes, et devaient aussi justifier notre création cinématographique» [Without Neorealism, we would never have begun [...] making movies without studio backing, with “a camera in hand and a good idea behind it,” immersed in our reality and probing our most important themes, which justified our human existence and also justified our cinematographic output] (Cárdenas & Tessier 62). Cinema Novo thus exhibits a dual heritage, one culturally specific and taking part in the national discourse on Brasilidade, the other relating to film history in a global context. Glauber Rocha, one of the vanguard filmmakers of the Cinema Novo movement, articulated the stylistic choices of the films as proclaimed in his 1965 article “An Esthetic of Hunger.”

Like the Regionalists who felt the strong need to bring the marginalized to the forefront of Brazilian letters, the proponents of Cinema Novo sought to focus the camera’s lens on unflattering images in order to capture on film Brazil’s sociocultural realities and may be considered as a spiritual and theoretical offshoot of the Regionalist and Modernist movements both in terms of their chosen themes and their rebellion against traditional models of representation. The stated aims of Brazil’s ‘new cinema’ were to bring the “true” Brazil to the screen and there was a concerted effort on the part
of filmmakers to assert cultural independence. In terms of film history, the subject matter of *Cinema Novo* exhibits an affinity with that of Italian Neorealism, a narrative style that focused on the harsh realities of life in post-World War II Italy. It also displays the individualist tendencies and personal visions of the *Nouvelle Vague* filmmakers, a perspective that gave rise to *Auteur* theory. A veritable movement that broke with the Hollywood-style productions of Brazil’s Vera Cruz Studio, *Cinema Novo* revolutionized production methods as well as content. Citing Ismail Xavier, Brazilian film critic Marcos da Silva Graça defines *Cinema Novo* in the following manner: “*fruta da atividade e de revolta de um grupo de jovens intelectuais burguesas de esquerda insatisfeitos com a nossa realidade social e dependência cultural das “linguagens” importadas, principalmente da cultura americana*” [[F]ruit of the activities and the revolt of a group of young leftist bourgeois intellectuals dissatisfied with our social reality and our cultural dependence on imported languages, principally of North American culture] (Da Silva Graça 1997).

In his study of the relationship between French film critics and *Cinema Novo*, Alexandre Figueirôa recounts the impact of Rouchian visual anthropology and the young Brazilian filmmakers who were revolutionizing their nation’s cinematic output:

*Le cinéma direct enthousiasmait les réalisateurs brésiliens et ils rappelaient très souvent le travail de Rouch qui, avec peu de moyens financiers, avec la caméra à la main, réussissait à montrer les vrais visages et les gestes des hommes simples. [...] On remarque que les critiques français qui se sont engagés à diffuser le cinéma brésilien ont fait de longs séjours au Brésil à mesure qu’ils connaissaient mieux le pays. Périodes pendant lesquelles*

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57 A popular notion advanced by French critics which posited that a film, although collaborative in nature was the vision of one person, or *auteur*, the term “director” or *metteur-en-scène* deemed insufficient to fully explain the central role of the filmmaker.
ils ont établi des liens avec les jeunes réalisateurs qui les maintenaient au courant de leurs motivations et des principaux événements de la vie brésilienne. La démarche, sur certains aspects, nous rappelle les procédures de l’investigation ethnologique (Figueirôa 156).

[Brazilian filmmakers were very enthusiastic about Direct Cinema and their work often brought to mind that of Rouch who, with little financial means, with camera in hand, succeeded in showing the true face and gestures of common people. [...] One notes that the French critics who endeavored to showcase Brazilian films spent long periods in Brazil in order to better know the country. During these periods they established links with the young filmmakers who kept them abreast of their motivations and the main events of Brazilian life. This venture, in certain ways, recalls the methods of ethnological investigation (emphasis added)].

The above citation is illustrative of the many layers of observation cross-cultural film studies are capable of generating and the impact of Rouch’s œuvre, the narrative film styles of Italian Neorealism and French Nouvelle Vague, all influential in the development of Brazilian Cinema Novo. Nelson Pereira dos Santos, in France during the late 1940s and early 1950s, experienced these movements first hand.

My interest is not, however, in doing an overview of Haitian or Brazilian cinema, but on questions concerning cultural representations and the historical relationship of ethnography and film specific to these two nations. By looking at documentary alongside narrative cinema, I analyze the manner in which we understand the distinctions between the two and seek to locate areas of overlap in the way culture is treated. John Weakland helps to make the case for studying narrative cinema in this fashion:

There are several basic reasons why fictional films should be especially useful in the study of general patterns of culture. In the first place, they are useful precisely because they are not factual. Instead, they tell a story; that is, they
present an interpretation of some segment of life by
selection, structuring and ordering images of behavior.”
[...] In projecting structured images of human behavior,
social interaction and the nature of the world, fictional
films in contemporary societies are analogous in nature and
cultural significance to the stories, myths, rituals, and
ceremonies in primitive societies that anthropologists have
long studied (Weakland 54, 60)."

To the extent that narrative films are reflective of the societies that produce them, the
content as well as the manner (considering both diegetic and extra-diegetic processes) in
which the story is told provides insight. Selecting, structuring and editing are as much a
part of narrative cinema as of documentary, allowing for creative perspectives. The
manner in which themes and events are presented provides insights into how one may
interpret the symbols associated with a culture, offering a means of deciphering “thick
description.”

The spectator’s perspective is only one element in the interpretation of
representation. In addition to the choices made by the filmmaker, one must acknowledge
the mediating aspect of the camera and its power to capture and see what is not
necessarily perceptible at the time of filming, an element derived from Russian
filmmaker Dziga Vertov’s articulation of the “kino-eye:”

Kino-eye is understood as “that which the eye doesn’t
see”... Kino-eye is the possibility of making the invisible
visible, the unclear clear, the hidden manifest, the disguised
overt, the acted nonacted; making falsehood into truth
(Vertov 1984, 41).

This construction relies on more than ocular function, for it underscores a primary tenet
in Deleuze’s theorizing: “For although the human eye can surmount some of its
limitations, there is one which it cannot surmount...[i]ts relative immobility as a
receptive organ means that all images vary for a single one…” (Deleuze 1986, 81). In discussing Vertov’s articulation of the kino-eye, Deleuze reminds us that film depends on more than just the difference or similarity between the human eye or the camera’s lens; cinema also relies on montage in creating perception.

American filmmaker Maya Deren also articulates a preoccupation with the possibilities film affords in impacting perception. For the American filmmaker, the “camera is [a] partner to [the] dancer” (Deren & Mekas 2004). Deren’s fascination with movement and ritual dance led her to apply for a Guggenheim grant for travel to Haiti to study trance and to record a collection of Haitian music. Her documentary, The Divine Horsemen, is a film that has long been part of the repertoire of documentaries on Haiti, disseminating a lasting impression of one aspect of Haitian culture. The sequences of Divine Horsemen were shot in Haiti by Deren between the years 1947-1951. Throughout the film, repeated images of Vodu ceremonies dominate the sequences. The film is very deliberate in its depictions. It is particularly when the focus is on the dancers that the film speed slows, even as the music accelerates and the tempo increases.

From a viewer’s perspective, it is as if the filmmaker wants to ensure that we do not miss a thing. As we consider Deren’s background as a dancer and choreographer, we understand that it is her fascination with movement, dance and trance, that dictates the choice of representation in this delayed manner. The manipulation of film-time is explained by Deren: “I have previously referred to slow-motion as a time microscope, but it has its expressive uses as well as its revelatory ones… [it is] a kind of intimate and loving meditation” (emphasis added) (Deren 2005 (1946), 109). The use of slow-motion in Divine Horsemen is pervasive, underscoring Deren’s fascination. The entire film then,
is just as much a testament to an element of Haitian culture as it is to Deren’s own philosophy and her conceptualization of cinematic time. She is concerned with the camera’s ability to capture images, but also with film’s curious way of suspending time: “the motion picture, though composed of spatial images, is primarily a time form. A major portion of the creative action consists of a manipulation of time and space… itself part of the organic structure of a film” (Deren 2005 (1946), 124).

Deren’s practice of visual anthropology is very personal, influenced by her avant-gardist perspective, her situation as a woman filmmaker and her training as a dancer. Deren was quite aware of her position as an outsider and like Arthur Ramos and Jorge Amado, who were initiated into Candomblé, Deren became a Vodu neophyte in an effort to bridge the span between insider and outsider. In a rather provocative statement, Deren classes artists as an “ethnic group,” that is, a population marginalized by mainstream culture much in the way that anthropological objects of study in developing nations, along with their works of art, customs and artifacts, were traditionally put on display and interpreted by critics and scholars:

At the moment I became freshly aware of a situation to which I had grown inured and oblivious: that in modern industrial culture the artists constitute, in fact, an “ethnic group,” subject to the full “native” treatment. We too are exhibited as touristic curiosities on Monday, extolled as culture on Tuesday, denounced as immoral and unsanitary on Wednesday, reinstated for scientific study Thursday, feasted for some obscurely stylish reason Friday, forgotten Saturday, revisited as picturesque on Sunday. We too are misrepresented by professional appreciators and subjected to spiritual imperialism....My own ordeal as an “artist-native” in an industrial culture made it impossible for me to be guilty of similar effronteries towards the Haitian peasants [emphasis added] (Deren 2005 (1946).
Deren’s self-nomination as an “artist-native” outsider (the hyphenated term seeks to establish identification with rather than opposition to the native “Other”), is a way to insist upon her skepticism about the notion of cultural study as it was understood at the time of her words. This is evident as she makes the case for her particular sensitivity to the generally defamatory portrayal of Haitians decried by Price-Mars and others. We need only recall the uproar caused by Craige’s and Seabrook’s sensationalist books and the inaccuracies contained therein to understand Deren’s point of view. Ironically enough, unlike the well-educated and indignant Price-Mars, the maligned peasant would likely be oblivious to either book. The observation came after Deren’s trips to Haiti, where she had gone in the hopes of studying dance and making a film.

The dilemma of finding a meaningful way of representing the “native” has proved problematic for the field of ethnography from its earliest days as a discipline. It is perhaps too facile to say that the reason Price-Mars and Ramos expressed dismay at the portrayals of their respective cultures was because the ethnographers were from underdeveloped countries. We can look to the words of Maya Deren, trained and working in the United States, to gain a deeper understanding of the state of visual anthropology in the first half of the twentieth century:

If I were to believe in many of the documentaries which I have seen, I would deduce that most “natives” are either predominantly hostile, taciturn or simply ill-humored, and capable of mainly two facial expressions: a blank stupidity punctuated by periods of carnival hysteria (Deren 2005 (1986), 80).

The propensity toward stereotype in representations that stake claims to authenticity and objectivity is laid bare by Deren. The statement also represents some of the tensions
relating to the development of anthropology over the decades, quarrels that also
preoccupy those working in cultural studies as well.

We can compare Deren’s treatment of Vodu to Jean-Baptiste Cinéas’s *L’Héritage
sacré* and to a more contemporary film by Laurence Magloire and Anne Lescot (both of
Haitian origin), *Of Men and Gods*. As we saw in chapter two, Cinéas’s primary
preoccupations with Vodu were providing it legitimacy as a subject worthy of scientific
enquiry and its validation as a sacred heritage. Prior to the title shot that reads *Divine
Horsem en: the Living Gods of Haiti*, the film clearly classifies Vodu within the category
of religion, counteracting any notion of superstition or magic to which the spectator may
have previously been exposed. Cinéas provided detailed descriptive passages for his
reading audience. Deren’s film also shows an overt concern with respect to the spectator.

The film’s primary function is didactic, as every scene, every movement is
explicated for the viewer’s benefit. Each relevant word is defined in detail: “[a] divine
spirit is called a *loa*; Papa Legba…grants contact with the other *loas*.” The sacred
drawings or *vèvè* are represented, one for each deity that is being honored in ceremony.
As the different rites are explained, the artifacts shown and their function presented in
detail, the camera cuts to a Vodu ceremony. We hear incidental music and chants, the
sacred rattle and the narrator’s voice, going over the action as it unfolds. Deren’s own
words underscore her ideas on the potential of cultural films to educate: in “Cinema as an
Art Form,” Deren provides a definition for “the documentary – an educational film,
promoted by individuals and organizations interested in social reform, visual education
and cultural dissemination” (Deren 2005, 19). The *vèvè* pictographs function as chapter
markers that visually separate the sequences as well as the rites, setting the framework for
the different ceremonies in honor of the various *loas*. Again we hear incidental music as the figures move in slow-motion. This constant deceleration contributes to an almost hypnotic effect on the viewer. Things appear not to be occurring in “real” time, but in a dream-like sequence where everything focuses on the figures in motion. The narrator’s voice, interjecting only when a distinction needs to be made, periodically interrupts the beat of the ceremonial drums. The camera seems to dwell on every gesture, as if in a meditative trance of its own.

For Deren part of the concern is her concept that film is more an art than science:

> As a maker of documentary films, I am aware of how many scenes I have contrived, rearranged or simply staged… These films have been presented in good faith and accepted as a ‘remarkably true picture of life.’ I do not feel that I have deceived anyone, because all these arrangements have been made in harmony with the spirit of that life, and were designed to present its character, moods, hidden meanings, beauties and contrasts… We have not produced reality but have created an illusion of reality (Deren 1946, 83).

This quotation from Deren shows the extent to which she believes a documentary’s claims to objectivity are often compromised at the outset. Choices are made in terms of shooting and editing, that conform to the filmmakers concept, understanding of the culture under investigation, knowledge of cinematic conventions, available footage and how it is put together in the editing room. In addition, the didactic aims of the filmmaker also play a role, as does the dissemination of the finished product and the concern for the targeted public. That something staged and contrived can be considered “a remarkably true picture of life” is an indication of how closely related documentaries and narrative films can be, as the best fiction films, despite dramatic artifice can also achieve an accurate portrayal of life.
Cinéas and Deren are preoccupied with Vodu as a religion and its place in society; in *L’Héritage sacré* as well as in *Divine Horsemen* the individual is subordinated to the religion and one’s function within it. The entire enterprise of both the writer and the filmmaker revolves around a defense and illustration of Vodu and individuals are represented largely as types. While Cinéas’s characters engage in debates validating the religion in both the local and global contexts, revealing the autoethnographic preoccupation with the question ‘how do we interpret ourselves, our collectivity’, Deren’s focus as an informed outsider, by contrast, is ultimately a relatively narrow one: the mechanics of the particular movements of those under the influence of trance and the particular ceremonies associated with each *loa*.

The decontextualization that runs throughout the film as we travel with Deren to different venues (signaled in part by the style of dress), is evident as the repetitions and variances provide an almost cyclical (perhaps even circular) frame of reference. The constants are the music, the congregants, the *loas*, and of course the camera, which is present but invisible. The only time that we seem to place Deren’s vision of Haiti back in the world that we spectators inhabit is, curiously enough, the final sequence, where the filmmaker is shooting a carnival scene. Suddenly, a khaki-clad soldier partially appears in the frame and forces the filming to stop. The film ends on this note of oppression, and it reminds us of the contentious relationship that Vodu has historically had with the forces of the State in Haiti, who by turns have attempted to suppress, contain or control it.

Cinéas’s preoccupation is less reductive, preferring to play on perceived oppositions: science and religion, rural and urban, observer and native informant, attempting to reconcile these discrete parts into a whole configuring Haitian culture. In
this scheme individuals are subordinate to the symbolism that permeates Cinéas’s text, with each character performing a specific function. The film by Magloire and Lescot, *Des dieux et des hommes* *Of Men and Gods* in contrast, focuses on individual practitioners of Vodu, on a particular segment of the population: homosexual males and their relationship to and practice of Vodu. Whereas in Cinéas’s text and Deren’s film, the only speech that is privileged as authoritative is that of the observers (we can recall the first-person exchanges between Cinéas’s ethnographers Benfield and Melfort), filmmakers Magloire and Lescot allow their objects of study subjective voice. We become acquainted with each of the men by name; we learn of their relationships to each other, both personally and professionally. We hear them speak of their specific relationship to and interpretation of Vodu and its significance to them and we are provided the opportunity to understand the issues that these men deal with in a largely homophobic society.

The filmmakers do not articulate a point of view for the men, but allow them to present their own perspectives regarding Vodu and their interpretations of its symbols and its place in their lives and their place in a society that frowns on homosexuality and transvestitism. In this documentary, the line between fact and creative personal fictions is blurred by the men themselves as some of them intimate their belief that the *loa* Erzulie is the cause of their homosexuality while others dispute the claim. In *Of Men and Gods* (and in *Le Mât de cocagne*), Vodu represents the radical potential of spiritual and corporeal liberation, but also of subservience and surrender as practitioners must always make sacrifices to the *loas* and be prepared to give up their body in the event that the *loa* is in need of a mount. However in Depestre’s novel a reversal takes place as Postel mounts the pole, one that was purportedly possessed. There are also the political
implications; Postel surrenders his body to death as an act of resistance and defiance to dictatorship.

In his study on ethnographic film, Karl Heider posits that: “It is inconceivable that an ethnographic film could be made in such a way that it did not distort or alter or select its images of reality in a myriad of ways. Therefore it gets us nowhere to ask if a film is subjective, or if it distorts alterity. The answer to both questions has to be yes” (Heider 49). The implications of such a statement are deeply relevant to our understanding of what an ethnographic film is and how it is viewed. Perhaps more acutely so than other types of documentaries, spectators feel the need to rely on the filmmakers knowledge and abandon themselves freely to the notion that what they are viewing on the screen is a spontaneous expression of culture that has been captured, in a manner of speaking, by the camera. Deren’s fairly defensive stance, given her choice of words such as “contrived,” “staged,” “deceived” all of which carry negative connotations, is indicative of the tensions that arise between conceptions of truth and reality and the notion of fiction.

Staging culture is an interesting perspective that encapsulates the attempts at ascribing a finite set of meanings to a group of specific symbols. But the significations cannot remain static and as such, the interpretation of these symbols is potentially limitless. *Vodu* is, by its very nature, fraught with symbols, including its own art, the *vèvè* that are carefully drawn and rely on symmetry and proportion. Representations of the gods abound in art and in literature, in the ritual ceremonies and in the film. Legba’s dark suit, hat and sunglasses (as we are shown in the film, where the mount dons the type of clothing associated with the god), were recognizable symbols to the masses that Duvalier cultivated in an effort to co-opt the religion’s enduring influence (as Depestre illustrates...
in his novel). With the majority of the population consisting of rural dwellers at the time that he came to power, and the high rate of illiteracy among the general population, the dictator used visceral cues to reinforce his mystique. By coding himself as the perpetual mount of the “keeper of the crossroads,” as the film informs us at the outset about Legba (the god who functions as the link between our world and that of the loas), Duvalier’s attire became a visual manifestation that needed little translation.

Staging is also a key concept in Peck’s *Désounen* (which I will turn to shortly) as well as in *O Pagador de Promessas* (1962) [alternately translated as The Promise Keeper and The Given Word] by Anselmo Duarte. The Brazilian filmmaker presents a perspective of religious syncretism in Salvador da Bahia, a city on Brazil’s northeastern coast. In a vein similar to Deren’s focus on the ceremonial aspects of Vodu, he places the music and dance of the Afro-Brazilian religion Candomblé in the foreground. Like Depestre, he plays up the political implications of religion as a catalyst for consciousness-raising and revolt against repression.

An early example of *Cinema Novo,* Duarte’s film showcases the struggle between the Catholic Church and the practitioners of Candomblé, taking us back to the types of issues at the heart of Brazilian Regionalism. The opening images of Anselmo Duarte’s film are close-ups of the musical instruments of the Afro-Brazilian religion: Drums, agogós (similar to the cowbell), cowerie shell covered calabashes, and the hands furiously playing them. The hands, which are keeping time to the chants of dancers in ritual garb (veils, hoop skirts, feathered headgear, etc.), dominate the camera’s focus before it settles its gaze on the image of a man kneeling before an altar supporting the statuette of a saint flanked by two lighted votives in a terreiro. The man makes the sign
of the cross, stands then leaves. The next frame shows a thick heavy smoke billowing through the sky, lapped by the flames of an intense conflagration. Leaving this destructive force behind them (it is unclear just what is burning, or why) are a man and a woman, walking along a rural dirt path. The man is laboring beneath the weight of a rough-hewn crucifix.

By beginning his film in this fashion, former actor Duarte gives us two of Brazil’s enduring iconic symbols: Candomblé and the Christian Cross, pointing the way to the cultural debate to follow. In his studies on afro-Brazilian culture, Arthur Ramos emphasizes the primacy of the musical instruments of Candomblé:

\begin{quote}
Nas cerimônias religiosas afro-brasileiras, são os atabaques os instrumentos essenciaes do culto. São elles que marcam o rithmo das dansas religiosas (batucajês), e produzem o contacto com as divindades. Todos os ethnographos insistem sobre o papel do tambor e do rithmo nas ceremnias magicas e reliogiosas como meio de encantação (Ramos 1951, 239).
\end{quote}

[In afro-Brazilian religious ceremonies, the essential instruments of the faith are the atabaques. They mark the rhythm of the religious dances (batucajês), and produce the contact with the divinities. All ethnographers insist upon the role of the drums and of the rhythms as the means of enchantment in the magical and religious ceremonies.]

The first frames of Duarte’s film uphold this ethnographic insistence on the sacred function of the instruments. The music dominates the soundtrack, which transforms into an amalgam of African and European elements as the man and the woman begin their
journey to the colonial capital, an aural undercurrent that reinforces Salvador da Bahia’s legacy as a center of cultural métissage.58

The ground beneath the couple’s feet is the drought-cracked earth of the sertão, and indeed several shots of the beaming sun are interspersed with shots of the weary travelers. Unpredictable downpours are a mark of the arid Northeast and indeed a windy rain storm bears down on the pair. The camera focuses on the peasant couple’s undeterred sandaled feet trekking through the mud. They are unmistakably on a mission. Their arduous journey takes them through a village where an increasing number of residents fill the newly sun-drenched street in order to gawk at the curious couple, at one point following them in Pied Piper fashion. The pair toils across a footbridge, a plain, a hammock of trees, pass a group of vaqueiros (cowboys), climb the steep incline of a barren hill and eventually arrive in Salvador da Bahia deep in the night. The soundtrack is a mixture of traditional samba rhythms and their insistent drum beats, with an overlay of operatic music and vocals. Within the first ten minutes of his film, Duarte succeeds in establishing Brazil’s syncretic heritage through two of its manifestations: religion and music.

Upon their arrival in the city, the glare of the streetlights reinforces the garish nightlife of the well-dressed urbanites who pour out of the nightclub, irreverently laughing at the sertanejos and their crucifix. It is also the only time that we see the couple walking downhill, as if the decline is meant to indicate a descent into hell. Indeed, the woman appears immediately tempted by a dapper young man in a light-colored suit who openly returns her stare, a broad grin on his face. She keeps her eyes upon him long after

58 A city at once Portuguese, Bantu, and Yoruba, Bahia is the charismatic center both of Catholicism, with hundreds of churches, and candomblé, with terreiros going back to the Iya Nasso’s founding house of worship in 1830. [205]
passing him by, mesmerized perhaps by the frankness of his gaze as well as by his sophisticated bearing before turning and lowering her head. Her husband, bent on his mission, is oblivious to this silent exchange.

The back-lighting silhouettes the pair as they head down the otherwise deserted, cobblestoned street, and the sound of jazz music in the form of a blaring trumpet, filters out of the nightclub. We can speculate about the director’s wit as the camera pans over to the name on the marquee above the door of the dance hall: “Exile Danças.” The term (written in English rather than in the Portuguese exílio), appears to be a nod toward the Regionalist (and Cinema Novo) position that these city dwellers are reflective of a cultural exile, symptomatic of an alienation by a people who’ve fallen under the influence of imported foreign symbols and codes.

In the next few frames, their destination is shown to us. Atop a steep flight of steps flanked at the bottom by two wrought iron lampposts that support an open gate, is a massive structure, imposing and ominous in the dim light. The pair appears infinitesimally small as they climb the steps of the sharp incline, the man laboring under the weight of his cross. The impressive building is a church and Zé, the protagonist, has ventured there to keep a promise to Santa Barbara for having saved the life of his mule Nicolau. The sturdy doors are locked (we subsequently learn that it is just after 4 a.m.) and his impatient wife wants to find a place to sleep, but Zé does not want to leave his cross; he must, after all, keep his promise.

Duarte’s film is, among other things, a study of the Catholic Church’s attempts to maintain supremacy over Brazil’s religious identity. The challenge to the Church’s exclusivity (a recurring theme in the regionalist and indigenist novels) unfolds slowly
with increasingly significant visual cues as the parish Priest, Father Olavo and Zé initially are shown to have a similar perspective regarding faith. In the morning, after a brief interrogation, the two men stand side by side, slowly climbing the steps of the church as Zé, having taken up his cross once again, tells Father Olavo about his promise to Saint Barbara and her miraculous intervention on behalf of his mule. It is after Zé mentions Candomblé that the Priest repositions himself both literally (he climbs several steps and is now looking down at Zé) and rhetorically in a series of discussions that revisit the debate over syncretism and legitimacy.

Zé is by turns accused of sacrilege, devil worship, idolatry and charlatanism as the dispute over religious iconography surges throughout the community. As we have previously seen, the dominant discourse codes the peasant as ruled by superstition, an image that the regionalists contest. Zé insists that he made a sincere promise to Santa Barbara, but Father Olavo informs him that he gave his word to Yansan, the Bahian name of the double of the Saint in Candomblé (Ramos, 1951). It’s the same thing states Zé. It is not, insists the Priest, educating the sertanejo on what he interprets as the historical subversion of the religion via slave resistance: “It is a confusion that dates back to slave days when the African slaves would mock the white masters. They pretended to be Catholics but in truth, they were praying to their own gods,” he states, looking down at Zé in an aggressive manner. “Santa Barbara wasn’t the only one; many saints fell victim to the farce.” This negative view of syncretism is presented inverts the relationship between the Catholic masters who along with their religion are “victimized” by the duplicitous slaves.
Unconvinced, indeed unmoved by Father Olavo’s interpretation, Zé insists that he must fulfill his promise so that he can go home with a clear conscience. It is this stubbornness that becomes the central dilemma for the rest of the drama: a contest of wills, appropriated symbols and the co-opting of representation for political aims. Duarte’s powerful use of symbolism (with Zé at one point utilizing the cross as a battering ram against the heavy wooden doors that the Priest has closed to him, being cheered on by others who are also taking up the cause), forces the spectator to question received notions regarding faith and modes of worship. Father Olavo’s refusal to allow one of Christianity’s most sacred symbols, the Crucifix, into a church is problematic for the spectator for whom this is counterintuitive. By setting up this dilemma, Duarte focuses our attention on the power that Father Olavo asserts, rather than his religiosity; his dominion over access to the edifice appears absolute. But the fanaticism of this power is also shown to be contradictory and absurd, a perspective that is borne out by the increasingly outrageous conduct of Church officials and the tragic consequences of their actions.

The practitioners of Candomblé, visually coded by their clothing as filhas/filhos de santo (traditional colonial dress for the women long: full skirts, lace blouses, head scarves; for the men: shirts and pants, predominantly all in white), are barred by the Priest from entering, who in his elitist function stands guard at the portal. The masses (largely shown to be Bahia’s Afro-Brazilian population), may gather in front of the church but they will not enter it. Duarte has connoted the Church’s historical role in Brazil as segregationist, exclusive, divisive. The symbolism of an inverted order is not
lost on Zé who states it appears that he has arrived at hell rather than heaven and that the priest is more like a demon than an angel.

It is the feast day of the saint and a procession makes its way to the church, carrying a statue of Santa Barbara up the steps. As the faithful make their way into the cathedral, Zé, instinctively feeling himself a part of the festivities, picks up the crucifix. The cross-cutting juxtaposes close-ups of the beatific face of the statue with close-ups of Zé’s rapturous expression; the sertanejo is visibly enthralled and awed by the image of Santa Barbara. As spectators, we neither doubt his sincerity, nor his belief. As Father Olavo welcomes the procession into the church, Zé’s expression changes to one of heartbroken confusion as he meets the Priest’s defiant stare.

As the debate gains wider attention, attempts are made to co-opt Zé himself as a symbol (we may recall the conflicts that pitted the State against the Regionalists and Indigenists who were themselves coded as enemies). The sertanejo becomes, by turns: a pawn for journalists who exploit the challenge that Zé represents to the Church, traditional ally of the Elite and the State; a rallying cause to that segment of afro-Brazilians who feel rejected by the Catholic Church but consider themselves part of the faith; a money-making attraction to the hawkers who want to capitalize on the curiosity that Zé arouses, eager to sell their wares to the throngs gathering around him.

The Church hierarchy itself, feeling pressed upon to mitigate the damage that Zé’s stubborn challenge is causing to its unyielding authority, is forced to debate the issue. The Bishop, upon learning of this public relations nightmare, fearful that the Church will be considered an enemy of the poor, is forced to act. Duarte includes a scene where assembled clergy debate the fear that the Church will appear hostile to the poor. One
priest advances the notion that a hard-line position is best, while another charges that the Church has not modernized enough. Meanwhile, one newspaper photo dubs Zé the “Novo Cristo.” Another captures the polemical debate under the heading “Místico ou Agitador?” [Mystic or agitator?] The political context of religious spheres of influence in Brazil is never absent. As with the opening sequence, Duarte again brings Afro-Brazilian music and dance to the fore, as a group of musicians with traditional folkloric instruments make their way to the Church. The camera focuses on the procession as it winds its way through the street in carnivalesque exuberance replete with a drum corps battery and men wearing suits and fedoras, twirling canes.

Attempting to isolate himself from the fray, Father Olavo has holed himself up in the belfry. He is not immune to the infectious rhythm of the Sambistas and kneels in prayer as if afraid that he is about to fall prey to temptation. Eventually the priest is back on the church steps, and things escalate as tempers flare. As the Bishop eventually arrives at the church, Zé greets him and in a gesture of piety immediately kneels and kisses the Monsignor’s hand. After acknowledging the man, the Bishop enters the church. His discussion with his colleague is succinct– the clergy cannot afford to have the church sit relatively empty with angry parishioners outside. As the Bishop takes his position alongside Father Olavo when they exit, both of them standing on the top landing looking down at Zé from their position of power, the Bishop puts Zé on the defensive. Insisting that he abjure a promise made under the influence of the devil and return to the fold of his “Sainted Mother Church.” The sertanejo is clearly conflicted and he insists that he cannot do that. The camera surveys the faces of the spectators when the Bishop asks whether or not Zé renounces. When cheers greet the poor man’s negative response, the Bishop
(showing his wily astuteness) publicly states that Zé believes more in the devil than in God. He leaves, and Father Olavo takes up the cause by preaching about false prophets, insisting that Zé is fooling the people. When Zé, in a moment of sheer rage takes up his cross to batter the doors of the Church, Father Olavo points to it as proof of Zé’s sacrilegious intent.

As he states this, the camera captures the priest hanging onto the wrought-iron gate post, humoristically reminding us of the iconic Hollywood image of King Kong atop the Empire State Building. He screams for the policeman to arrest Zé and a television news camera comes to cover the story. Things degenerate as a woman takes her infant to Zé, who has now been transformed into a “miracle worker” as we see sick people flocking to him, singing “Ave Maria” as they follow him down the church steps. The narrative is interrupted when once again Duarte decides to showcase Brazilian music and dance. The chants of “Ave Maria” are slowly drowned out as the Berimbau becomes the focus of the camera.

A crowd gathers around a pair of Capoeira dancers (a type of mock fighting that originated on the slave plantation); chanting, hand-clapping, drums, singing, sambistas, all take center-stage as the camera repeatedly focuses on the instruments and the dancers’ movements. The priest has again retreated to the belfry. A low angle shot has him looking down on the throng, and in a fit of anger, he desperately strikes at the church bells in an effort to drown out the pulsating rhythm. Structurally, the opposition of sincere faith and religious hypocrisy reinforces the syncretic duality of Brazil.

Things deteriorate when the authorities, a severe-looking group of men in suits come to arrest Zé on the church steps. The sertanejo, feeling cornered and insisting that
he will remain where he is, pulls out his knife. As he climbs the steps keeping a wary eye on the police, he backs right into the priest, who knocks the knife away and sends Zé hurtling down the steps. The plain clothes policemen set upon him violently, and a low angle shot captures the scene from above. Again, a circle of people surrounds the group at the center, but this time, things quickly deteriorate into a mêlée, as the people, outraged and unable to resist the opportunity, fight back against the authorities. The camera switches to a high angle and medium shots as we see arms and legs flying, hear shouts in a riotous display of anger. Suddenly shots ring out and silence takes over. The camera switches back to its low angle, and we see the cross, lying on the steps in the center of the frame. Zé falls and the circle immediately takes shape once again. The poses are juxtaposed as Zé falls with his head at the feet of the cross which is lying beside him. Duarte’s portrayal is that of a popular revolt against abuse of power that is thwarted by bullets.

Close-ups reveal the multi-racial make-up of Brazilian society, and looks of anger and startled confusion abound as the spectators look on the scene and at each other. Even the priest appears horrified when making the sign of the cross as he walks toward the dead man, now lying in his wife’s arms. The mãe de santo cries out and as if to punctuate the seething anger at the injustice of things. The camera focuses on the resolute faces of the spectators, who begin to signal each other. The small gestures are not lost on the men in suits, who take off running up the church steps in a moment of role-reversal. The seemingly powerless and accommodating masses feel empowered, and Zé’s body is “righted” and his body is placed on his crucifix with his head at the top. A group from
among the young dancers become pall-bearers as the cross is lifted, with Zé’s Christ-like body posed in iconic fashion, arms outstretched, one leg crossed over the other.

The berimbau sounds a lament as the funeral procession heads toward the Church with the priest unable to prevent the throng from entering the church. In a dazzling display of imaginative framing, an interplay of high and low angle shots, shifts in perspective and lighting punctuate the victory of common folk over the establishment. When the crucifix supporting Zé’s body looms above the camera, which appears startlingly powerful with the sharp contrast of the dark form against the brightness of the sky, the magnitude of the martyr’s role is undeniable. The next frames are taken from a high angle, and we see the priest, who seems peculiarly small, shrinking away from the cross as the camera looks down upon Zé’s peaceful face. Once again, the crucifix is used as a battering ram as Zé’s promise is kept and he enters the church. The final image is of his widow, slowly walking up the steps, making her way into the church alone.

The battle over cultural symbols found in the work of the Regionalists is revisited here. The dialogues reflect the debate over spheres of influence and our understanding of signification. Here again we have the stark contrast between worldliness and naiveté and the refusal of powerful segments of Brazilian society to accept an integral aspect of the nation’s cultural identity. Robert Stam informs us that “[t]o prepare himself for the filming, Duarte immersed himself in Bahian culture, reading up on the city’s history, studying locations, and learning to play the berimbau, which he himself played for the soundtrack” (Stam 1997, 214).

We have previously seen this insistence on field research on the part of writers and documentarists. Duarte, Pereira dos Santos and Diegues also engaged in the
ethnographic study of the cultures they represent in each of the films represented here. Whether the subject is contemporary Bahia (Duarte), an eighteenth century maroon civilization (Diegues), or an Indigenous society during the colonial period, (Pereira dos Santos) the filmmakers each make a sort of pilgrimage to Brazil’s northeast. In the following two films, historical record is called into question as cultural synthesis is explored in two distinct contexts.

Nelson Pereira dos Santos’s *Como Era Gostoso o Meu Francês*, a parodic take on ethnographic method and its treatment of Brazil’s autochthonous population, is marked by moments of near-obsessive self-reflexivity. Price-Mars and Ramos discussed the Indigenous peoples of the Americas in their ethnographic research, and so I view Pereira dos Santos’s film as participating in that aspect of the larger project of cultural identity and ethnopoetics. As a work of ethnographic relevance, *Como Era Gostoso o Meu Francês* is more than merely the history of a protagonist and his encounter with an indigenous tribe in Brazil in the early days of its colonial history. The film operates on several different discursive levels: it is a metadiscourse on the history of ethnography. It is a counterdiscourse that questions the factuality of traditional historiography. It is a dialogue between observer and informant, an exchange between outsider and insider. It is an intertext between film and the Allegorical representations of the Other in Renaissance engravings, between anthropological accounts and travel writing. It is a *mise en abyme* of ethnographic method, taking us through the history and evolution of attempts to capture the Other in words and images, utilizing a method of reduplication in the telling and retelling of Europe’s encounter with the Americas, an exploration of the signifying of alterity. It is an exercise that meditates on the notion of film genre. It is a further
articulation of Oswald de Andrade’s conceptualization of anthropophagy and it is a dialectical negotiation between the film and the spectator. Self-reflexive and self-referential, the film resonates with a rich, polysemic texture that defies passive and indifferent viewing.

The story at the heart of Nelson Pereira dos Santos’s film is rather simple. A Frenchman in colonial Brazil is taken prisoner by the Tupinamba tribe of Indians and is immediately mistaken for a Portuguese. As such he is considered an enemy of the tribe and is condemned to die after eight months of servitude. His death will satisfy Chief Cambapepe’s need to avenge the death of his brother at the hands of the Portuguese, collectively considered the enemy. Though the narrative sequence is linear, the techniques used to tell the tale rely on intertextual insertions, self-referential irony and parody. Despite the intermittent incorporation of texts and images, the visual narrative is rather fluid and straightforward. The camera maintains a fairly objective distance and there are few close-ups; these are used sparingly, such as when the subject in the frame is caught in a contemplative mood. The film is shot entirely on location with all exterior shots in the lush Brazilian jungle, exploiting the abundance of coastal panoramas, atmospheric sunsets, impossibly green foliage and breathtaking vistas: what traditionally connotes an earthly paradise.

The film begins with a voice accompanied by classical music playing on the soundtrack, informing us of the “latest news from Admiral Villegaignon” as we watch an indigenous tribe in the mountains. We quickly realize that our narrator is unreliable, for his words (spoken in Portuguese) are at odds with the images of the scenes unfolding before our eyes. “The country is a barren desert, our narrator informs us, as we look upon
the rich vegetation; “the natives are barbarous savages, without courtesy or humanity” we hear, as we see the authoctonous group share a feast with a group of Europeans. ⁵⁹

Immediately, we understand that the “reality” is at odds with the official discourse of the written text, the lie (for can we call it anything else, if we are to believe our eyes?) will endure long after the eyewitnesses (and spectators) have gone.

As if to reinforce this point, another sequence contradicts our narrator: “We have arrested and imprisoned four of the principal mutineers…on the following day we liberated one of them so that he could plead his cause.” What we witness is the image of a blond man in ball and chains, surrounded by soldiers. A monk is reading from a Bible and giving a final blessing, making the sign of the cross before the blond man whose head is bowed. “He broke loose and threw himself into the sea and drowned,” the monk states while we watch as the man is pushed off the edge of the cliff where the group was standing and into the sea. We hear the splash of the water off-screen as we watch the soldiers turn and leave, while the monk takes one last look at the sea.

Beginning with the opening credits, where engravings depicting scenes of European exploration in the Americas alternate with the names of the production team we are treated to allegorical images of the Encounter: a caravelle, a shipwreck, several images of Indigenous peoples in their everyday lives, the taking of the Europeans as prisoners, preparation of a feast, the dismemberment of a body, the cooking of the body parts and then the celebratory cannibalistic feast. Through these preliminary images, Pereira dos Santos has in effect presented us with the content of his film, using an

⁵⁹ The part of the phrase in parentheses is not denoted in the subtitles, an element which recurs often enough to be of interest.
alternate visual form that allows the filmmaker to reference the history of pictorial representation (Stam 1997). 60

As early as those opening scenes, we are convinced of the subjective partiality of the narrator whose limited perspective conforms to a metadiscourse (that of the Conquest) with which we are familiar, but whose words are disengaged from the facts on the ground. Not least significant, in the interests of this project, are the institutions listed by Pereira dos Santos under the heading “in collaboration with,” a list that includes the Museu do Índio, Museu Nacional, Museu do Exército Brasileiro, Museu da Policia Militar, and a host of others. As discussed in chapter two, these institutions are the guardians of more than artifacts and visual evidence; they also serve to sanction the official discourse that is perpetuated through the ages. They enshrine the formal History attributed to the encased, archived, displayed, catalogued artificates, often silencing the histories that surrounded them. The intertextual freeplay of the film allows spectators to deconstruct and reconstruct the narrative in a different configuration, not privileging any one account as the one True tale. Pereira dos Santos utilizes satire and wordplay to illustrate that the “truths” we take for granted as history are oftentimes something quite different.

60 In his book, Stam informs us that there existed a “complex historical relationship between the French and the Tupinambá. In the 1550s, at the time that France was trying to found the colony of France Antarctique in Rio de Janeiro bay, they brought Tupinambá Indians back to Rouen so that they might play themselves at a kind of French-built theme park built in honor of Henry II and Catherine de Medici. The Tupinambá staged episodes from their daily life – cooking, hunting, fighting – for the delectation of French observers, among them the French philosopher Montaigne. The film is largely based on the diary of Hans Staden, a German gunner captured by the Tupinambá and who wrote a sensational travel tale – Hans Staden: The True History and Description of a Country of Savages, a Naked and Terrible People, Eaters of Men’s Flesh, Who Dwell in the New World Called America – which set the tone for lurid accounts of cannibals in the New World. (Although some scholars, such as William Arens, are skeptical about claims of Tupinambá cannibalism – dos Santos does not dispute that such accounts have a basis in truth.) [248]
By pointing to the unreliability of the narrator and offering us the impressive list of collaborators and institutions (those partial arbiters of culture), the film also invites a questioning of its function and role as disseminator and “witness” of culture. It invites us to reflect on our own understanding of history, reading and subjectivity. Is there a reason we should give more credence to the images unfolding before us than to the narrator who is reading a historical artifact, sanctioned by those institutions that we recognize as being legitimate and influential guardians of the past? Pereira dos Santos exploits the fact that spectators tend to privilege the point of view adopted by the camera – at least during the screening – suspending the notion that this is one more narrative strategy adopted by the filmmaker.

The images only tell part of the story and the gaps, the subtexts, are what the filmmaker will provide for us so that we become actively engaged in the deciphering of the visual illustrations. The film to come is another version, another manner of representing what the engravings have shown us. In the meantime, however, Pereira dos Santos repeats his narrative in a different form: textually. As if providing us a blueprint of the scenes, Pereira dos Santos uses citations, projected for us on the screen, so that we may read the travel accounts of those who bore witness. The filmmaker’s strategy in providing us with those texts, quite literally as the citations are interwoven throughout the narrative and posted (white lettering on a black screen) long enough for us to read, is a means of drawing us in as critical spectators. A useful exercise in a film that is multilingual (the Tupi language being predominant throughout) and with subtitles that are choosy about what they will translate.
Saved from drowning, our protagonist is immediately captured by members of the Tupinambá tribe. A debate ensues between the two tribesmen, who are debating the man’s nationality: French or Portuguese. In an interesting exchange where the Frenchman and two other prisoners are asked to speak in order to “prove” their sameness or difference through language, the Tupinambá are unable to discern any distinction between the two Romance languages. A discussion ensues where it is evident that the French are esteemed while the Portuguese are reviled.

In a comical interlude, the Portuguese captives rattle off instructions for cooking lamprey: “Put the lamprey in scalding water, take its guts out…” (an allusion to the fact that they themselves will soon be the main ingredient for a Tupi meal), while the Frenchman repeats in rote fashion in his native tongue “Ces barbares marchent tous nus et nous nous marchons inconnus…” [These barbarians walk around naked and we foreigners walk around unknown]. The question of language is later settled by the chief, Cunhambébe, who erroneously decides that the Frenchman is speaking Portuguese; the foreign tongues are indistinguishable to the Tupinambá leader, but his opinion is the only thing that matters. This misidentification is an irreverent retelling of Columbus’s legacy of rechristening the autochthonous peoples of the lands he encountered “Indian,” a term which persists to this day. Pereira dos Santos shows us that the act of naming merely resides with those in power, at times having little or nothing to do with truth or fact. The film forces us to reflect upon our understanding of history and acceptance of received knowledge. The scene is an echo of Macunaíma’s observations in Andrade’s text where our protagonist contemplates the reasons for the supplantation of the name Icambiabas by the appellation Amazons for the indigenous tribe (cf 167).
The question of valorizing the French and devaluing the Portuguese also harks back to Brazil’s own Francophilic past, a worldview that led Gilberto Freyre to lament the “certo anti-lusismo que vê em tudo que é herança portuguêsa um mal a ser desprezado,” [a certain anti-lusophonismo which sees in everything that is of Portuguese heritage an evil to be despised (Freyre 1967 (1926), 41). Pereira dos Santos transforms his prisoner into an ethnographer doing the equivalent of fieldwork. The widow of the slain Tupinamba becomes the protagonist’s wife according to the customs of the tribe. In one sequence, the Frenchman (who has by now learned to speak the Tupi language) asks Sembiopepe, his wife, to recount the originary myth of Caraiba, the Tupi ancestor: “The one who taught us how to build a fire?” “What else?” he asks. She tells the story as he listens attentively “He taught the Tupinambás how to shave, how to make weapons, to beat the enemy, to plant manioc and corn, to drink cauim. He taught us how to build houses. We lived like animals.” Though the protagonist takes no notes, we learn that he has committed to memory the legend as told to him. As we cut to everyday scenes, the man’s voice takes over the telling of the tale in French: “He built a house (of Brazilwood)…” The recoding of the Tupi ancestor easily conforms to the colonizer’s efforts to “civilize” the savages who “lived like animals.” “It will be a nice present for my uncle. He hasn’t yet tasted a Frenchman” states one of the tribesmen. “You’re christened, you can’t eat him” responds another tribesman. “My uncle is not christened” is the reply. We have seen this reverential consideration for the French decried in the work of the Regionalists.

Pereira dos Santos’s irreverence recalls that of the Modernists. Indeed, there is an undercurrent of homage being rendered to Oswald de Andrade and his
reconceptualization of anthropophagy into a literary trope, a means for Brazil to define itself and articulate its own interpretation of its past and its culture. *Pau-Brasil* (Brazilwood) is the title of Oswald de Andrade’s Modernist manifesto as well as the title of a tome of his poetry (in the film, references to *pau-brasil* as the building material of the Tupinambá is illustrative of the wood’s importance). As we saw in the work of Mário de Andrade, the emphasis is on the mix of ethnic and cultural elements and not confined to accepted tropes, genres or received notions.

When the following citation from one Padre Anchieta appears on the screen, “São como tigres, porque estão mui soberbos com as coisas que lhes dão os francêsés; sua natureza é cruel, amiga da guerra e inimiga de tôda a paz;” [They are like tigers because they are very arrogant with the things that the French give them; their nature is cruel, they are friends of war and enemies of peace], the language is familiar to anyone who has ever studied the annals of the conquest of the Americas, even in the most watered down version of some history books.

What the filmmaker provides us with is a recreation of a Tupinambá village, the day-to-day existence of its inhabitants, their rituals and beliefs, their world views and attitudes on life and death. He also offers a critical review of eurocentric representations of cultural Others, inverting roles and undertaking to rewrite history with the very texts that attempt to teach us otherwise. By the end the disjunction between what we see, read and hear completely removes us from any comfortable acceptance of truth, forcing us to rely on our own interpretation of it making the realization of the extent to which subjectivity inevitably colors understanding. In the end, our Frenchman has indeed become Tupi, culturally if not factually; he has come to understand and accept their way
of life and rejects that of the West. There is a sense that a common understanding has been reached, on an intuitive level, between the protagonist and his captors.

In a manner more explicit than Deren’s, Pereira dos Santos forces his spectators out of the protective cocoon of easy access by filming primarily in Tupi-Guaraní, with limited subtitles in Portuguese. By insisting on the inversion of roles, with the use of satire and forcing the reconceptualization of what had long been accepted as proof of barbarism, the Brazilian filmmaker places the burden of historical and cultural understanding, as well as the interpretation of symbols, on the spectators.

Fellow Brazilian Carlos Diegues’s film *Quilombo*, like that of Pereira dos Santos, is concerned with his nation’s historical past and cultural heritage. In this case, it is the maroon society, the *quilombo* of Palmares in Brazil’s northeast. The focus of the film is one of the components that formed part of Price-Mars’s and Ramos’s initial exploration of the apport of African cultures to the Americas, the historical impact of slavery, the importance of folklore as a source for understanding cultural processes. Diegues’s vision is of a Brazil that valorizes the contributions of all of its ethnicities, and as we have seen with Arthur Ramos, there is an element of recuperation motivating his work. With *Quilombo*, Diegues attempts to recreate a world by showing the inner workings of a society largely viewed from the outside by hostile enemies. The original chronicles of Palmares were written by the Portuguese. In literature, the legend of the free society was the source of near caricaturization of the last leader of the community, Zumbi. Diegues’s nuanced portrayals of the Slaves recasts the roles of the protagonists in the imaginary of the Brazilian people. Despite being doomed to annihilation, their defiant battle for freedom is a message that the filmmaker imparts to his compatriots.
In light of Brazil’s problematic history, including the military dictatorship which began in 1964 and lasted decades (another episode that marks a certain commonality with the Regionalists is the State-sanctioned repression against artists beginning in the 1960s), the legacy of Palmares is part of a history of a fight against repression that all Brazilians, not just the African-American segment of the population, can lay claim to, a symbol that belongs to all of Brazil.

Diegues’s interest in ethnography comes from a variety of sources. First and foremost is the influence of his father, an anthropologist who introduced him to the cultural study of Brazil: “[M]eu pai, o antropólogo Manoel Diegues Júnior, era um pesquisador da nossa cultura e foi o primeiro a me falar sobre o Brasil, a me dar as bases para o meu gosto por esse território geográfico e humano onde eu havia nascido [My father, the anthropologist Manoel Diegues Júnior, was a researcher of our culture and was the first to speak to me of Brazil, who gave me the foundation for my love of this geographical and human territory where I was born] (Diegues 2004, 15). Diegues also recounts the importance of Brazilian literature, specifically modernism and Jorge Amado, whose work he remembers reading when he was about ten years old. The author’s influence on the filmmaker’s opinions, global outlook and notions of culture was decisive, one of the factors leading to his participation in the Cinema Novo movement which advocated a revolutionary, socially engaged and genuinely Brazilian cinema.

Diegues is from Alagoas (as was Arthur Ramos), a state in Northeastern Brazil, an environment that exposed him to the oral tales and legends of Palmares, the largest of the quilombos, or maroon societies in Brazil. His own fascination with the legendary figure of Zumbi, the last leader of the quilombo of Palmares, begins from childhood. As
we have seen with Rachel de Queiroz, the importance of *oraliture* in the northwestern states provides an ample field of research and inspiration with larger-than-life characters and a rich history. Like Arthur Ramos, Diegues is determined to fill voids relative to the African and African-American elements in and contributions to Brazilian culture and history. Part of Diegues’s enterprise is of re-integrating Brazil’s slave narratives and oral traditions with the official discourse, which as Ramos pointed out, is fraught with omissions and denials.

With *Quilombo* Diegues revisits the free community of Palmares; his first film on the subject, the initial entry in Diegues’s “slave trilogy,” is *Ganga Zumba* (1963); the other two films are *Xica da Silva* (1976) and *Quilombo* (1984). The works cover three decades of the filmmaker’s career and point to his dedication to this fabled period in Brazil’s colonial history. *Ganga Zumba* and *Quilombo* both deal directly with the maroon phenomenon of Palmares. Brazilian scholar and playwright, Abdias do Nascimento provides a succinct description of the free society:

> [T]he…*Republica dos Palmares*… a true African state organized in the forests of the state of Alagoas by runaway slaves. From 1630 to 1697, the “Black Troy” resisted 27 attacks launched by the Portuguese and the Dutch, who dominated for some time the state of Pernambuco. Palmares at one time held about 30,000 people including men, women, and children; they kept a perfect political and social organization functioning, as well as a system of production, a religious life, and a vigorous military system of defense. Palmares represents the first heroic and desperate outcry of the Africans against the disintegration of their culture in the lands of the New World (Do Nascimento 1978, 394).

Although the notion of a “perfect political and social organization” is debatable (the last leader of Palmares, Zumbi, came to power in a virtual coup d’état), as is the idea of a “true African state,” the longevity of the maroon society points to a tenacious defense of
autonomy and a rejection of the status quo. Palmares was comprised of different federations or ethnic groups, and Diegues shows this in one sequence where the assembled are asked to vote for or against war with the Portuguese (I will return to this scene later). Indeed, one of the central points of Diegues’s film is the schism in leadership over such deep divides in ideology as pragmatism and idealism, between seeking collaboration and making a radical break.

In his films, Diegues empowers those traditionally marginalized by the dominant discourse: women, blacks, Brazil’s indigenous populations, the northeastern poor. It is certainly the case in *Quilombo*, where a slave woman, Dandara, is one of the community’s fiercest warriors, where a Portuguese woman, a former captive of the Dutch, becomes King Ganga Zumba’s chief advisor and where collectivity means a society that is inclusive as well as exclusive.

In discussing what it is like to be on a film set, Diegues tells us “*uma filmagem é a organização de um mundo paralelo, uma metáfora da realidade; você passa a viver num mundo que exclui todo o resto que está em volta. Em geral, é uma metáfora na qual você reconstrói o mundo real num nível de fantasia. Às vezes, esses dois mundos se misturam e dá confusão*” [A film set is the organization of a parallel world, a metaphor for reality; you enter a world which excludes everything outside of it. Generally, it is a metaphor in which you reconstruct a real world that is a fantasy; sometimes these two worlds mix and cause confusion] (Diegues 2004, 67). The parallel with a maroon society is evident; it is in many ways “a world which excludes everything outside of it,” a fact that makes Diegues’s recreation of Palmares a fusion of ethnographic and historical research as well as an imaginative retelling that reflects the filmmaker’s optimism and
Diegues’s definition of his film: “Quilombo, um filme de época, uma utopia histórica,” captures the undercurrent of hopefulness beneath the quotidian violence of slave existence. This utopian ideal is evident at the outset, in the lyrics of the title song by Gilberto Gil, who sings “a utopia um por todos e todos por um” [a utopia for all and all for one] (Diegues 2004, 88).

The film opens with an overlay of historical text against the background of a red sunset and black mountain before the opening credits begin to roll. This text is a brief history of the genesis of the arrival of the Portuguese in Brazil in 1500, of the importation of Africans to slave their entire lives on the sugar plantations (the primary source of wealth in the colony). It informs the viewers of the absolute power of the masters over the life and death of their slaves, of the slaves working without respite, of often fatal punishment and torture. We read that some slaves managed to escape to the “virgin interior of the country” where they formed free societies named quilombos, of which the most famous was the quilombo of Palmares, founded at the end of the XVIth Century. In an article on Zumbi, Irene Diggs describes the location in the following manner:

The site of the quilombo of Os Palmares was a mountainous region, steep and precipitous – a natural defense for the inhabitants – but at the same time a virgin land whose exuberance was considered the best in the state of Pernambuco (Diggs 62).

Then the film score starts, and Gilberto Gil (who would later become Minister of Culture) sings of Palmares, the “black El Dorado of Brazil.” From the outset, the upbeat insistence upon the existence of Quilombo underscores Diegues’s positive vision. The film is also a counterdiscourse to the idealized (and even romanticized) depiction of the Portuguese as relatively benign colonizers vis-à-vis their anglophone counterparts and the sociologists
portrayal (most notably Freyre) of a quasi harmonious existence on the plantation
between the masters and their slaves. Diegues does not flinch in showing the ruthlessness
of slavery in Brazil, of the colony’s patriarchal order that exploited labor, women and the
poor.

The opening scene displays the brutality of the slave plantation as a demonstration
of how to administer torture without killing the slave (who nonetheless dies) is taking
place. As with Pereira dos Santos’s film, there is disjuncture between what we hear and
what we see. The first time that we encounter Ganga Zumba, he is in the act of forcefully
restraining a fellow slave (possibly an overseer) in an effort to stop him from killing
another slave, an older man named Aroroba. Ganga Zumba, with a metal collar around
his neck and a dirty rag wrapped around his midriff, immediately stands out as a new
arrival, as opposed to the creole slaves who are clothed in shirts and pants. As we learn
from one of his peers, he is new to the area of Santa Rita in Pernambuco province, but
already he brings with him the notion of escape.

Ganga Zumba’s impact on the small group of slaves working in the canefields is
reinforced by his centrality in the frames of the shot sequence. From the close-up as he
overpowers the other slave, to the full shot as he makes his assertion that he will not
allow the beating of “Mr.” Aroroba to continue (the address shows a sign of respect to the
elder man, despite both being equal in terms of slave status), to a shot showing him
hovering over the beaten man, (authoritative yet soothing in his insistance that Aroroba
will not die), Ganga Zumba is nearly always in the center of the frame with the other
slaves at a measured distance in the background. When he surveys those around him, in
response to the observation that he will surely be punished for the attack on the overseer, he boldly suggests that the slaves unite.

The next sequence shows us a group of Europeans bringing in newly purchased slaves to the plantation walking through an alley in the cane fields. Suddenly, they are set upon by the group led by Ganga Zumba. The tall stalks of sugarcane, historically a source of the slave’s misery, now function as a means of protection. Sugarcane is recoded as an ally that provides cover for an ambush. The slaves quickly overpower the small group, using their blades to cut throats rather than cane, and to free the other bound slaves. The female slave Dandara, who accompanied her masters, serving them aguardiente, immediately sides with the insurgents, using her master’s sword to kill him.

As we survey the dead lying in a heap in the middle of the cane alley, a slave who is amassing the weapons picks up a heavy metal crucifix, surveying it closely as he holds it high. The analogy is clear: the cross represents yet another arm of conquest. Meanwhile among the group the discussion turns to the impossibility of remaining on the plantation. The proposed solutions expose an immediate break among the slave population. Aroroba insists upon a return to Africa. Dandara states that she was born here and knows nothing of Africa, only that it is too far. Another slave suggests Palmares, which they explain to Ganga Zumba is a society of runaway slaves. Aroroba insists that he will brave the sea in order to return and asks who will go with him. Several slaves step up. As he speaks to Ganga Zumba in an African language, another slave insists that he “speak in the white man’s tongue so that we may all understand.” Ganga Zumba translates: “He wished us a night full of blessings.”
Immediately then, Diegues insinuates the notions of alienation, exile and a mythical Africa that is, for some, nothing more than a distant memory, for others a lost homeland and for still others an unknown. The unifying factor of language is shown to be an appropriation for those forced to learn it in order to engage in any type of dialogue with those born into it, even as its use is also illustrative of loss. Language is a vehicle as apt at separating as it is at uniting. Eventually the groups separate and go off in different directions. The camera follows Ganga Zumba and the few that accompany him, the soundtrack thumping with a rhythmic drumbeat. The next shot is that of a vivid sunset of bright orange and red hues, the sun a deep gold in the center of the screen, hovering over the darkened landscape. A voice over reminds us of Moses leading his people to the Promised Land.

In the next frame, we see a Portuguese *caboclo* (in this instance designating a frontiersman) recounting the biblical tale to two children, their swarthy complexions suggesting their Amerindian origin and indeed we receive confirmation of this when we are introduced to the man’s wife. A group of slaves encounter the couple and ask for help. “We don’t have much, but enough to share,” states the man. The pair, although poor, is willing to accommodate the peaceful group, led by a white-bearded elder and Ganga Zumba. The old man marvels at the sound of the drums that indicate Palmares in the near distance and Ganga Zumba asks the man to accompany them to Palmares. The man, a squatter, nevertheless feels tied to the land despite his meager existence. In the event that the landlord ever throws him off of it, he will simply relocate. Brazil is very big, he tells Ganga Zumba, who responds to the couple’s generosity as the wife hands out some provisions with an offer of reciprocity: You have given us what we need and don’t
have, we also will provide you with what you need but don’t have: protection. “No one will throw you off this land,” declares Ganga Zumba. This scene is a glimpse of (and a political statement on) one of the issues that has plagued Brazil since colonization, the issue of land ownership, with the relatively minute number of absentee landlords and the large numbers of squatters and subsistence farmers in the vast interior and northern provinces.

Ganga Zumba’s trusting and magnanimous nature is immediately marked as a point of contention, when the other slaves remark that Palmares’s leader, Acotirene, will not like the idea of a white man being brought to the free society. Diegues provides us with two strong female characters from the outset. Dandara, transformed from slave to warrior, figures heavily in a leadership role, and Acotirene, the wise and mystical matriarch. When Acotirene asks Ganga Zumba why he brought a foreigner into their midst, Ganga Zumba reminds her that they too came from elsewhere. “In a land where all are foreign, what is a foreigner?” he asks. Ganga Zumba’s astuteness is revealed as he seeks allies among the disenfranchised nordestino peasantry, informing Acotirene that once the Europeans stop fighting amongst themselves, they will join to destroy Palmares. It is Acotirene who renames Abiola, son of the King of Arda, “Ganga Zumba,” the one chosen by Xango to lead. Ganga Zumba’s immediate reaction is to recoil from the responsibility of leading Palmares. The interior of the hut is more reminiscent of Africa than what one would associate with Brazil.

We are shown a large hut filled with African artifacts, references are made to Xango, Acotirene reads cowrie shells and Ganga Zumba becomes the “chosen one” the new leader of Palmares who will succeed her. Acotirene’s throne sits on top of a
“mountain” of pottery. The old woman is a sort of seer who knows at Ganga Zumba’s coronation that her time to leave earth is at hand. The scene is rendered mystical as the camera shifts from Ganga Zumba in full regalia to Acotirene being carried off into the mist and disappearing from view. In a reversal of the god “mounting” the horse (the human body of the initiate), Diegues juxtaposes a literal image of Acotirene sitting astride the shoulders of what we must imagine is a god. Meanwhile, the crowning of Ganga Zumba continues with his possession as Xango descends into the body of the newly consecrated leader, dancing in celebration. A close-up shot of Ganga Zumba’s face is replaced by Xango’s cowrie-coverd head in a metaphoric cut, before the camera pulls back to a medium shot of the god’s rhythmic movements. Shots of the mountain are interspersed throughout. In one scene Ganga Zumba raises a newborn toward the heavens, shouting “Palmares!”

We are shown the rhythms of everyday life as the maroons chant while working the field, pulverizing the earth. The medicine man is providing instruction in ethnobotany, passing on knowledge of medicinal herbs by detailing the uses of local produce. He goes on to provide rudimentary language lessons to the children, passing on African words that the children then translate into Portuguese. The medicine man/griot (we can recall Amado’s character Jeremias in *The Violent Land*) is the keeper of cultural traditions, which he passes down orally to the youngest generation.

*Quilombo* operates on at least two levels. The one focuses on the historic events that center on the rise and fall of Palmares in the larger context of Brazilian history. The other is the recreation of a society, largely viewed from the outside. To this end, Diegues shows his astuteness and imagination by utilizing visual cues to connote difference
between the populations of Palmares. In one scene, when the schism between Ganga Zumba’s decision to make peace with the Portuguese colonizers and Zumbi’s insistence that the only answer is war, the groups are presented in such a way as to show the diversity of the African peoples. The costumes visually code the Palmarenos as Nubians, Sudanese, Berbers, Muslim, Congolese, Bushmen; turbans, grass skirts, body paint, jewelry are distinguishing signs, an acknowledgment of the diversity of the Africans who arrived in the new world.

Irene Diggs describes the society of Palmares:

The principal occupation of the Palmarenos was agriculture, for which the settlers used their African experience and what they had learned in the fazendas (plantations) of the Western Hemisphere…But not all the inhabitants of the mocambos or towns of Os Palmares were dedicated to agriculture: some traded with gold and skins, others who were artisans established blacksmiths’ shops and forges where they tempered arms for the defense of their freedom, some made brooms, wove baskets and hats, while others dedicated themselves to pottery and ceramics (Diggs 62-62).

Diegues recreates this aspect of a thriving community, showcasing the abundance of goods being traded: livestock, crafts, crops, etc. The filmmaker highlights such symbols as a capoiera rondo, the collectivity of work, a child kicking a ball (a clear reference to soccer). Religious syncretism is shown primarily in the character of Ganga Zumba’s rival: Zumbi, consecrated by the the dead ancestors as Ogun’s chosen warrior-chief. Raised by a priest, the newly-crowned warrior cannot fully extricate himself from his Catholic upbringing and in one scene a crucifix is “turned on its head” and into a sword

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61 The reference to soccer, is somewhat problematic in this context as the sign is so closely associated with Brazil, but not to an eighteenth-century maroon society, given the sport’s British roots and its founding dates.)
by this same Zumbi. As with Duarte’s film, Diegues dramatizes the revolutionary potential of faith, a nod to the Liberation Theology movements in Latin America. Allusions to the Bible abound, there is a “judgment of Solomon” as Ganga Zumba decides the fate of a basket of corn fought over by two women. His response? That “what is the world’s is the world’s. As the land belongs to no one, what it produces belongs to all.” This is an obvious critique of the land issue in Brazil, a contentious problem and constant source of violence throughout Brazil’s history.

As the inevitable end of a divided Palmares nears, the riotous colors of the community, shown primarily through the bright hues of the foliage, the clothing and the honey-colored huts, is replaced by violent reds and dark browns. There is a claustrophobic feel as the exterior shots en plein air give way to predominantly interior shots of minimally lighted caves or huts, the dim glow bouncing off textured walls. It is a visual cue that underscores “[t]he image of Palmares, of a community isolated and imprisoned in its freedom…” (Rassner 210).

Despite the tragic end of the free society, Diegues maintains the optimistic message of his film, that freedom is something worth fighting for, and that Brazil, an inclusive Brazil that values all of its people, has a history that is unique and illustrative of struggle against injustice. Diegues is always aware of his audience and indeed his work often displays elements of collectivity. As Cristina Duarte observes: « Carlos Diegues semble en effet accorder une place importante à toute element visant la prise de conscience du spectateur, element qu’il a trouvé au sein même du film historique, détournant en quelque sorte les lois du genre » [Carlos Diegues seems, in effect, to grant an important position to all elements aiming to raise the consciousness of the spectator,
an element he discovered in the bosom of the historic film, to some extent deviating from all types of generic rules] (C. Duarte 2002, 173). Like Ramos, he wants to rewrite the historical accounts of Brazilian to reflect those elements ignored, underrepresented or repressed by the state apparatus. His own project of recuperation involves the taking of disparate elements in order to create and recreate, provoke, and inspire.

If Diegues’s treatment of maroon society is a meticulous and linear composition, The film by Bolivian-born Jac Avila, *Krik? Krak!*, is a composite where the editing is, to use the French term, *décousu*. Avila eliminates a static sense of temporality by avoiding a chronological conception of history. Instead, the structure of the film plays upon the binary of continuity and discontinuity; the focus is on the continuity of Haiti’s violent history (from slavery in Saint Domingue to contemporary struggles) with periods of calm giving way to abrupt power changes. The scenes are cyclical, giving the film a certain rhythm despite the “fractured” editing.

From the opening sequence with its flashes of a figure running through the brush, the sound of drums and the image of an old woman telling a group of children the story of Bois Caïman while a voice-over in French relays to the spectator what is being said, an unsettling feeling takes hold. Peaceful scenes of everyday life such as men in boats along the shore are interspersed with images of a man racing through a forest with a machete. This interjection of a violent image in an idyllic scene immediately reorients the viewer’s frames of reference. The film is an amalgam, a collage made up of the filmmakers’ own documentary film on Haiti, newsreel footage of the American Occupation and of Duvalier’s dictatorship, a retelling of slavery in Saint Domingue, a *mise en abyme* of the film version of Graham Greene’s *The Comedians* (1967), directed by Peter Glenville
(which itself was a study of State terror and violence) and a study of storytelling which juxtaposes local folktales with the story of the Magi. The intertextuality reaches beyond the filmic references, addressing narrative modes from the interview to the tale. The subject matter shifts from depicting varying elements of Haitian culture: coumbite (collective work), slavery, the Caco resistance during the occupation, migration, protests, Vodu, Catholicism, peasant massacres, politics.

*Krik? Krak!* reconfigures the act of storytelling alluded to in the title. “Krik? Krak!” is the signal in Haiti that the storyteller is about to begin a tale. The audience, upon hearing “Krik?” signals its receptivity by responding “Krak!” It is an interactive ritual, where the storyteller utilizes familiar characters, easily recognizable from the repertoire of the nation’s folklore in a give-and-take exchange that sometimes includes riddles, puns and folktales.

Avila is thus referencing the traditional art of storytelling as well as the history that has become part of Haiti’s folklore and mythology. The film meshes documentary footage and intertextual film references with narrative cinema in order to tell a story that underscores the violence that has marked the history and culture of Haiti. The film is self-reflexive, clearly engaging in a dialogue that questions the nature of documentary and narrative cinemas as it constructs its own innovations in story-telling. It is, in its way, also documenting the history of cinema viewing with its utilization of the newsreel, reminding us that, for decades, this was the primary source of cultural contact of foreign lands for Western spectators. Due to the use of different footage the lighting is inconsistent, making use of a variety of color values (from black and white to bright color to seemingly washed out tints) and textures (graininess, shifts in focus); this array in the
sequences further highlights the various moods created at intermittent intervals.

The editing of the film is evocative of Russian filmmaker Sergei Eisenstein’s conceptualization of montage, a style of editing that aimed for “emotional dynamism,” whereby the purposeful juxtaposition of incongruent shots creates an energy that provokes a response from the spectator. The fast-paced cutting of *Krik?Krak!*, along with an oftentimes jarring soundtrack, uneven lighting and varied tempo, is apposite for the frenetic energy the film seeks to create and the uncomfortable mood it fosters as it engages the spectator. The overall focus: a particular history of violence that is at once local and global is replicated metaphorically in the fragmented and frenzied editing. Although similar in content to *Haiti: Kom sa ta dweye* (Haiti: How Things Should Have Been) which also utilizes intertextual film references, newsreel footage and the testimony of those who lived through the post-Occupation period and the onset of the Duvalier years, the latter film contains is non of the frenetic intensity that characterizes Avila’s film. The contrast between the two films highlights what I perceive to be one of the differences between a post-modern documentary and an autoethnographic film: while *Haiti: Kom sa ta dweye* is concerned with telling a story that the filmmaker feels himself a part of, Avila’s film is as interested in form as in content, exploring different techniques and combinations in the arrangement of scenes.

In a self-reflexive moment of Avila’s documentary, we are reminded of the potential power of the filmic image, particularly in the context of modern-day political violence. During an interview sequence, a young man who has consented to participate in the production, afraid of being recognized, expresses fear of being filmed. This gesture of “hiding” from the camera is an acknowledgment of the power of the medium;
filmmaking can be, after all, a political statement as well as the undertaking of a cultural study. *Krik? Krak!* is a history of Haiti as well as a study of the history of the dissemination of culture, particularly through the medium of cinema. Avila’s film is a model of Stephen Tyler’s articulation of a post-modern work:

> Because its meaning is not in it but in an understanding, of which it is only a consumed fragment, it is no longer cursed with the task of representation. The key word in understanding this difference is “evoke,” for if a discourse can be said to “evoke,” then it need not represent what it evokes, though it may be a means to a representation. Since evocation is nonrepresentational, it is not to be understood as a sign function, for it is not a “symbol of,” nor does it “symbolize” what it evokes. The post-modern text has moved beyond the representational function of signs and has cast off the encumbrances of the substitution of appearances… (Tyler 128).

It is precisely in what the film leaves open to interpretation for the individual spectator that Avila’s structure is evocative rather than traditionally representational.

This notion of evocation is an important facet of the work of Raoul Peck. The provocative exploration of memory, personal history and History writ large in Peck’s documentaries, such as *Lumumba: Death of the Prophet* and *Désoulen: Dialogue with Death* (the film analyzed here), and his earlier narrative films *L’Homme sur les quais* (Man on the Wharfs) and *Haitian Corner*, are illustrative of his reconceptualization of cinematic expression.62 *Lumumba: Death of the Prophet* is a biographical and historical work on two levels. It tells the story of Patrice Lumumba, assassinated during the turbulent independence movements of Africa in the 1960s, as well as the Peck family’s flight from the Duvalier dictatorship, which began in 1957. It is as much about Peck’s

62 The documentary film on Congolese Patrice Lumumba appears nearly a decade prior to Peck’s narrative film titled *Lumumba*. 
childhood memories of his parents’s exile as it is about Lumumba and postcolonial history.

Raoul Peck’s *Désounen: Dialogue with Death* begins with a citation from Haitian Poet Georges Castera: “Ah! How am I to put all these words into a letter – eyewitness of a time which is yet to see its last supper of cannibals.” The specter of the allegorical cannibal, a persistent image in the history of the Americas, juxtaposed with the iconic denotation of the Biblical “last supper” sets the tone for what is to come. For Peck, cultures are not isolated from each other, making his choice of Castera’s poem reflective of his world view: « *Il faut arrêter d’envisager le monde en cultures séparées, tout est intégré. La culture se fait dans la rue et ne craint ni les frontières ni les contradictions* » [One must stop viewing the world in terms of separate cultures, everything is integrated. Culture is made in the streets and fears neither borders nor contradictions] (Baquet 110).

The cannibal last supper is an unsettling spectacle to contemplate. The word evokes the title of Craige’s *Cannibal Cousins*, a book that helped fuel the mis-characterization of Vodu rites. In *Ainsi parla l’Oncle*, Price-Mars marvels, « *En vérité, nous ne connaissons rien de plus platement stupide que la légende qui fait du Vaudou un culte d’anthropophages* » [In truth, we know of nothing more flatly stupid than the legend that makes of Vodu an anthropophagous cult...] (Price-Mars 1928, 145).

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63 *Dessounin* (desounen, désounin) (V. ENC) The process of separating the gros-bon-ange from the body after death is called *dessounin*, and it occurs before or soon after the Catholic burial of the body. During this ceremony, the guardian *loa* of that person is also separated from the soul. The *houngan* often becomes possessed by the *loa*, who makes pronouncements about the future of the société. Powered by the *loa*, the priest is reborn, as the divine essence of life that belonged to the dead person becomes part of the houngan, passing through on the way to the cosmic plane where the *loa* live. Only a fully initiated and experienced *houngan* should take the spirit from the dead in this way, as it is risky and dangerous procedure. The malevolent spirits of the dead may do harm to an ill-prepared priest.

[http://www.templex.org/Voodoo/voodoo_encyclopedia.htm](http://www.templex.org/Voodoo/voodoo_encyclopedia.htm)
Apart from the title, Peck’s *Désounen* has nothing at all to do with *Vodu*, and instead, in a vein closer to Rouch’s *Jaguar*, the Haitian filmmaker explores contemporary migration and the difficult circumstances of the island nation’s poorest. The figurative cannibal is perhaps the Duvalier regime in which Haitians “ate their own” in unprecedented manner, or it may refer to the devasted economic system that persists in ravaging the poor, or perhaps it signifies the sea which continues to swallow them whole.

The structure of *Désounen* weaves a narrative allegory together with straightforward documentary filmmaking structure. Utilizing the tradition of story-telling as a voice-over to accompany his interviews with Haitian citizens, Peck juxtaposes an interrogation of the lives of those who inhabit a nation in perpetual decline, making a commentary on the perils of migration over the waters in makeshift boats and the despair that has settled over the island nation. Historically, the primary focus of the films from Haiti has been that perennial source of fascination, *Vodu*, and more recently, the sociocultural effects of perpetual political chaos and economic strife. The value of a filmmaker such as Raoul Peck (who served as Minister of Culture in Haiti during 1996-1997) is that he takes part in the island nation’s tradition of political engagement as articulated by Haitian writer Jacques Stephen Alexis (see Peck’s film *Capitalism and Nothing But*), while breaking away from the narrow focus that has dominated the content of films about Haiti (Alexis 8-10).64

The first image that we have in *Désounen* is that of a valley with mountains in the background. The narrator’s voice begins the dialogue of a peasant’s encounter with

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64 Jacques Stephen Alexis “On the Marvellous Realism of the Haitians” *Présence Africaine* 1956 [8-10]. In this famous essay, Alexis sums up four objectives of Marvellous Realism in the context of the responsibilities of Haitian artists, including that they “reject all art which has no real and social content.”
Death, while the camera follows a marching band leading a funeral procession in a cemetery. The next shot cuts to the sea as the off voice continues: “The dead were complaining about the living, many of whom were already thought to be dead.” In a desolate statement that morbidly captures the mood of the country, a man states, “Happiness doesn’t exist in Haiti.” The opening sequence with its focus on the lush tropical foliage contrasts sharply with the marked spoliation of the now barren land, recalling the *Indigéniste* and Regionalist landscape.

Images of the flora, of banana and palm trees, are accompanied by Creole singing before the title shot comes across the scene. The camera continues on to focus on the foliage with close-up shots of nature oblivious to a sudden downpour. The scene cuts to a woman speaking in Creole. She too has a story to tell, a story of desperation and death. Madame Kléber is sitting in a field, and as she recounts her tale, the camera cuts to a shot of a photo of her son. As she informs us that she didn’t want him to go, the film cuts to a high angle shot of a boat on the water. The scene alternates between shots of Madame Kléber and a child playing in the water with a makeshift sailboat. The woman’s tragic tale continues: “Someone came to me and told me ‘Féfé is dead, Charles is dead, Clément, Liodile, Antal are dead.’ There’s nothing left for me to do but die.”

The next sequence follows a man, a former exile we are told, through a heavily wooded area. He is accompanied by the filmmaker, identified by his first name, Raoul, who remains offscreen. The man, Maxime, recounts his years of exile and his return to post-Duvalier Haiti. He prefers the life of privation he is leading to the errancy that he experienced as an exile. Maxime informs us that he bought some land from Compère, a
small farmer whom he considers an “old-style Haitian,” a man of his word, a rarity in this post-dictatorship period of national disintegration.

Peck intersperses shots of Maxime’s new house being built with Compère’s observations of the dire situation the people are in, with snippets of the dialogue and shots of the coast. The tradition of folk remedies seems supplanted as we ponder a scene of a “medicine” man selling pills by the half-dozen. The hopeful chords of church singing contrast with a devastated landscape; Maxime informs us that a chronic water shortage combined with deforestation has turned the earth into hardened clay.

The stirring image of a young man playing a makeshift guitar made from an empty paint can causes one to marvel at such ingenuity and passion for music. Throughout the film, Peck’s journey, which takes him from town to country, is a commentary on a way of life that has long passed, supplanted by a hard-scrabble existence. Whether speaking to school children, slum-dwelling peasants or French-speaking professionals, the lament is universal. When the scene cuts to the cemetery, a constant motif throughout the film, we encounter the marching band that had headed the funeral procession. An old man sermonizes in French; the “Magnificat” is sung in Latin. The next scene features a lone trumpeter playing “Taps” before breaking into bars form “Fly Me to the Moon” and “The Shadow of Your Smile.” This last tune morphs the sounds of congregants singing Creole in church with that of the Haitian national Anthem sung in French, a polyphonic layering, illustrative of the hybrid nature of the culture.

This too is a tale of Haiti, a visual manifestation of the decline of what was known in colonial times as “la Perle des Antilles.” Madame Kléber’s tale of tragedy ends on a hopeful note however; as her story unfolds we learn that the truths about all of those
deaths were erroneous. In fact, although the boat capsized, there were more survivors than initially believed. Echoing this optimism is the Peasant’s dialogue with Death, where dreams are brought to a much humbler and modest level. The particular choice of sequencing shows how despite the spectator being privy to the voices of the participants in the documentary, the filmmaker exerts a measure of control over the message. In essence, Peck has also carefully staged his dénouement (we can recall Deren’s words regarding the role of the filmmaker), not showing his hand until this final act.

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**Culture and Context**

In an article on the *Cinema Novo* movement, René Prédal writes: « *Le “cinéma novo” se propose d’inciter le spectateur à agir; il n’est donc ni cinéma didactique…ni même d’analyse objective…le cinéma doit produire un choc* » [*Cinema Novo* means to incite the spectator to act; it is therefore neither a didactic cinema…nor an objective analysis…cinema must shock] (Prédal 1972, 6). While it is apparent that a film such as *O Pagador de promessas* promotes thought-provoking debates and incorporates elements that may indeed shock in certain circles, I would argue that there is a constituent didacticism in the way Duarte showcases *Candomblé*, though he refrains from any type of overt commentary on the subject. Despite his ethnographic research into *Candomblé* and the care that the filmmaker takes to present some of the visual aspects and sounds of the religion, Duarte never delves deeply into the faith itself; it is not central in the manner that Deren or Magloire and Lescot focus on *Vodu* (an element of their being documentaries with a particular focus).
The practitioners of *Candomblé*, although central to Brazil’s religious identity, remain largely ornamental in Duarte’s film. The filmmaker is not out to teach us what *Candomblé* is, but rather what its place in Brazilian culture should be: a legitimate expression of faith on par with Catholicism and therefore a central rather than marginal element. The film’s commentary on the collusion between Church and State in the clash against religious expression underscores, in my opinion, Duarte’s nuanced didacticism and his edifying undertones in the debate regarding cultural signification. The powerful final images of Duarte’s film insists upon his moral unambiguous position of religious tolerance and social inclusion.

Spectatorship plays a central role in the considerations of all filmmakers, but overtly culturally-bound films are usually destined toward a distinct viewer or targeted audience. Films such as Deren’s *Divine Horsemen*, Diegues’s *Quilombo*, Pereira dos Santos’s *Como era gostoso*... are openly didactic: there is a clear intent to teach a particular cultural aspect in a given context. Of these, Deren’s film is perhaps the most explicitly so, requiring the least effort on the part of the spectator to decipher meaning as the privileged voice of the narrator explains every aspect of the content for the spectators, who need only absorb the information. It is also clear that Deren’s film is destined to an American audience to whom she is introducing *Vodu*.

Duarte’s critics accused him of catering to a foreign rather than a domestic audience, in part because of the manner in which he showcased *Candomblé*. With *Como era gostoso*... and *Quilombo*, Pereira dos Santos and Diegues respectively, are, I would argue, more concerned with the domestic audience. Their two films are presented as journeys into the self-discovery of a partially occluded, somewhat misinterpreted past.
For Diegues, there is an aura of the sensational in this revisiting of and delving into history: “toda viagem ao passado tem o mesmo sentido fantástico de uma viagem ao futuro, de que todo filme-de-época é uma science-fiction (original emphasis) [(A)ll trips into the past have the same fantastical sense of a trip into the future, with the implication that all historical films are science-fiction”] (Diegues 1988, 58). Indeed, Diegues imbues his film with an element of cosmic mysticism.

While both *Quilombo* and *Como era gostoso o meu francês* are historical at the base, Pereira dos Santos guides the viewer into delving deeper than the official record. The disjuncture between the visual and audio texts that often contradict the traditional chronicles are techniques the filmmaker utilizes in an attempt for us to unlearn the idiom of sanctioned discourse. Pereira dos Santos destabilizes the traditional tendencies ethnography and history have of privileging the visual (observational method) or the textual (documentary evidence) respectively. The film’s juxtaposition of contradictory discourses serves to undermine our often unquestioning understanding of culture and history; the variance between what we see and read, what we read and hear forces the spectator into an active interrogation of the processes at play in signification.

With Avila’s *Krik? Krak!* and Peck’s *Désounen* the intertextual references allow the spectators to creatively construct a story partially based on their own knowledge, partially on the creative manipulation of the films’s sequencing. The discontinuities serve to destabilize the notion of historical accuracy as linear, immutable or objective. Much in the way that Andrade and Depestre layer their narratives, what we find in all of these films is an insistent (to varying degree) effort to engage the decoder of the text. Passive spectatorship is challenged by the responsibility placed on the viewer to reassemble the
pieces of the puzzle that are revealed. The level of the spectator’s involvement in thus creating meaningful discourse is on the one hand in proportion to one’s own familiarity with the history of the culture presented on film, while on the other, it is managed by the cues provided by the filmmaker. Peck, for example, is constantly aware of a particular segment of his audience: the Haitian diaspora. However, cognizant of the potential of film to reach beyond any limited group of spectators, Peck’s films on Haiti exhibit an awareness of the interplay between external forces and internal pressures on the island nation and its people and therefore exhibit a notable political bent.

The discordant, jarring soundtrack of *Krik? Krak!*, the anachronistic interjection of pop music in *Quilombo*, the freplay of American pop music, Latin liturgical chants and hymns sung in French or Haitian Creole in *Désounen* and the provocative use of language (such as Tupi in *Como era gostoso*…), for example, provide opportunities for the spectator to react to the sonoric input in addition to the visual experience. Rather than using incidental music, Peck and Avila purposely utilize the soundtrack to help create a particular atmosphere, a move that takes them closer to the narrative film techniques utilized by Duarte and Diegues than more traditional ethnographies such as Deren’s. The overt manipulation of the soundtrack underscores the efforts of the filmmakers to challenge the typical dependence spectators had developed on the narrators of nonfiction films. This represents a shift away from the “dominant form of documentary [that] emerged in the thirties whose influence remains strong to this day…[t]hese documentaries composed their views of people lyrically or expressionistically, and used them rhetorically in advancing a social thesis, usually explicitly stated by a (typically male) narrator’s authoritative voice” (Rothman 1996). It also represents a wider scope
that counteracts the reductive tendencies exhibited in earlier ethnographic films with the type of decontextualization that Deren’s film comes closest to. Deren’s subjects are figures who facilitate her study of movement, they never speak for themselves and we never learn anything of them as individuals. Avila’s film is a move away from the anonymity of Deren’s figures, but with its focus on form (how it is delivering the story it is relating), it is more a frame of reference for the collectivity than a means for individual expression. The autoethnographic films, on the other hand, ensure a measure of empowerment to their filmed subjects; there is no place for anonymity in Désounen or in Of Gods and Men. In addition to providing voice to those traditionally voiceless objects in ethnographic films, the acknowledgement that these are thinking subjects who are perhaps best able to interpret their own thoughts refocuses our attention to context and cultural relevance.

Rather than focusing on a single pattern or element, the filmmakers visually incorporate syncretic facets in the cultural development of each of the two nations and highlight particular factors. We can see this in the focus on the berimbau or the capoeira in O Pagador de promessas, in the hymns of Désounen, in the music of Gilberto Gil for the soundtrack of Quilombo or Diegues’s subtle nod to soccer, the difference in the significance of the sea in Divine Horsemen where it is part of ritualistic renewal as opposed to Désounen where it is seen as an escape route or death trap depending on one’s fate, evident in the embedded storytelling within the diegesis: the first-person account that interrupts the descriptive narration in Divine Horsemen; the story of Madame Kléber which unravels what we believed was a story of death but turns out to be a tale of survival; the counternarrative of Como era gostoso….
Context, rather than the “culture in isolation” propensity which characterizes early ethnographies, is also a prominent feature of the films studied here. The autoethnographic works in particular allow us to look at the contrasts and similarities to post-modern ethnography. The parallels are most apparent in the ways that they challenge received notions of representation and the demands made on the reader/viewer; understanding the processes of the coding and decoding of symbols is but one aspect in the task of the filmmaker who must incorporate this insight into his or her own vision into the finished conceptualization. But whereas the post-modern documentary film is a closed system, that is, inclined to focus on its own method of telling and less concerned with cohesion, autethnographic film (whether in documentary or narrative form), is always contextualized, endeavoring to impart an understanding of the object of study.
Conclusion

The intersections between ethnography, poetics and politics have provided fertile seeds for articulations of cultural identity in Haiti and in Brazil based on a continuous dialogue between narratives of the “self” and a discourse of the “other.” In contrast to their persistent marginalization at the edges of traditional representations of American Latinity, Brazilian and Haitian social scientists, writers and later filmmakers undertook a program of determining and defining a cultural identity for themselves beginning in the late 19th century, a process which accelerated rapidly in the first half of the 20th century. The dialogical interchange evident in the works of ethnographers such as Price-Mars and Ramos reflects each man’s keen intellectual awareness of the necessity for inter-hemispheric exchanges of information as well as their understanding of the limits of traditional approaches to ethnography. Reaching out to Ramos was one attempt by Price-Mars to answer questions regarding Haiti’s perceived exceptionalism: «Deux pays occupent les limites extrêmes de la divergence [inter-américaine] : le Brésil et Haïti...particularisés par leur langue au milieu du double bloc, anglo-saxon...et hispano-américain... » [Two countries occupy the extreme poles of inter-American diversity: Brazil and Haiti...singled out by their language amidst the two main groups: Anglo-Saxon and Hispanic-American...] (Price-Mars 1966 (1956), 52). By looking specifically to Brazil, Price-Mars was seeking to isolate how history, politics, poetics and culture operated in the construction of representation and cultural identity in a specific Latin American context.
Thirty-five years after Price-Mars’s words, we can find an echo in Jorge Amado’s harsh critique of the ways in which Haitian and Brazilian literatures are relegated to the margins of Latin Americanism:

*I believe that to speak of “Latin American literature” is a term which has a colonialist connotation. And when it is used by Iberians, especially the Spanish, it has an imperialist connotation; and when we accept it, we place ourselves in the position of the colonized. That’s my opinion. Additionally, Brazilian literature is generally not included in “Latin American literature.” There is an enormous book written by a Cuban, Joan Marinalo – an eminent scholar who was a university Dean…and there is no mention of Brazil, no mention of Haiti! Haiti with its powerful and beautiful fiction! Not to mention its poetry…* (Amado, 1990, 58).

Amado’s words underscore the complexities of perception, representation and the challenges that linguistic difference pose for comparative Latin American studies. The author’s comments argue against the embedded colonization of the canon with its artificially narrow categorizations. Furthermore, Amado, Price-Mars and the other scholars represented here understood that the imagined opposition of northern Brazil and rural Haiti to the West was an incorrect premise, a fact that film scholar Robert Stam
articulates succinctly: “Latin America […] is irrevocably hybrid, a cultural site at once western and non-western. The “West” and the “Third World” cannot, therefore, be posited as antonyms, for in fact the two worlds interpenetrate in a space of “creolization” and “syncretism” (Stam 1995, 237). Rather than parroting the presumed oppositions that some outsiders engaging in comparative anthropology often posited, the autoethnographic enterprise is an undertaking that seeks to provide a more holistic conceptualization of cultural identity, at one with the nation (not necessarily uncontestedly so), but transcending nationalism, as evident in the persistent pursuit of cultural knowledge beyond borders.

To consider Latin America as a monolithic block is an erroneous assumption that leads to the types of overgeneralizations and exclusions that Amado, Price-Mars, Ramos and others have decried over the years. I would elaborate on Stam’s comments on irrevocable hybridity and state that there are more than two worlds at play: African, Indigenous, Western (European and North American), Semitic and Asian and that all of these elements (ethnic, ideological, historical, political, linguistic, poetics) recombine in Latin America in various configurations. The multiplicity of influences is what makes attempts at the stabilizing of cultural symbols a challenging enterprise: “Cultural poesis – and politics – is the constant reconstitution of selves and others through specific exclusions, conventions, and discursive practices” (Clifford 1986, 24). “We have seen how conventions influence the output of information and the coding of symbols. Collectivity and consensus are as important as heritage, perhaps more so, as they heavily impact the decipherment of codes, which often evolve from generation to generation, contingent on historical as well as socio-political context.
In addition, reception involves individual experiences and shapes the reading or de-coding of the written or visual text. Spectator identification or alienation resonates along cultural lines as well, dependent on the interplay of insider/outsider and personal sophistication. In her meditations on film, Deren states: “The appreciation of a work based on experiential, or inner, realities consists not in a laborious analysis based on the logic of a reality which a prepared spectator brings to the work. It consists, rather, in an abandonment of all previously conceived realities. It depends upon an attitude of *innocent receptivity which permits the perception and the experience of the new reality* (original emphasis).” Even a “new reality” must be mediated, however, through the levels of understanding that a spectator or reader brings to the viewing/reading experience.

The attainment of an autoethnographic methodology in order to better understand the processes at work in the construction of cultural identity does not altogether shield one from the limitations of traditional ethnography. Even as the social scientists sought to articulate their own beliefs on the matter, drawing attention to the emerging discipline’s failings, the complexities of such an endeavor are clear. While both men occupy the position of native informant in contrast to the outside anthropologist, Ramos and Price-Mars could never fully place themselves in the role of their own object of study, whether intellectually, culturally, linguistically, nor, in a manner of speaking, geographically. There is an irreductible distance between them and those who are traditionally characterized as an opposition between the elite and the masses.

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65 Deren (1946, 23)
Fieldwork cannot substitute for a lifetime of dwelling in a particular place, though the insights it provides are invaluable to cultural studies and affords a perspective that one might otherwise never develop. The value of ethnography lies in its ability to recognize and articulate difference. Those articulations are problematic, however, a fact that both autoethnography and post-modern ethnography have pointed out. Ramos became an initiate in Candomblé but my research suggests that Price-Mars never became a practitioner of Vodu. While each developed an understanding of these religious practices and sought the origins of certain cultural aspects that they found to be systematic in segments of the population, the lives of these two researchers were distinct from their subjects. This shifting position of inside/outside is what prompts their multiple perspective and gives rise to their determined advocacy on behalf of those whom they feel are unjustly maligned and unfairly characterized just as they endeavor to defend their nations against misrepresentation and misunderstanding.

Marcus and Cushman observe that “[b]ecause of the overwhelming concern of early anthropologists to establish culture or society as a legitimate focus for inquiry, the existence of the individual was usually suppressed in professional ethnographic writing. In his or her place was substituted a composite creation, the normative role model or national character” (Marcus & Cushman 1982, 32). In Ainsi parla l’Oncle, Price-Mars’ strategy (as is that of Ramos in his writings) is to point to a collective consciousness, a national “We”:

[R]ien ne saura empêcher que, contes, legends, chansons venus de loin ou créées, transformés par nous, soient une partie de nous-mêmes révélée, comme un exteriorization de notre moi collectif...Ils constituent d’une façon inattendue et ahurissante les matériaux de notre unité spirituelle. Où
In this articulation, Price-Mars’s conceptualization of collectivity and culture conforms somewhat to Benedict Anderson’s perspective of nationalism as a shared concept. Price-Mars initiated a dialogue with his peers and the youth of the nation which generated a new way for Haitians to imagine Haiti and present it to others. Ethnography provided the tools that precipitated a redefinition of what constituted Haitian culture.

Arthur Ramos was insisting on a counter-discourse that challenged accepted notions of assimilation and cultural identity, also looking to a generation of writers coming of age at a crucial moment in Brazil’s formation as a republic. It is fortuitous that Ramos was also analyzing Brazilian culture from a perspective of center-margin, forged during his formative years as a psychoanalyst, which brought him into close contact with those viewed as operating outside the norm. This orientation radicalized with Ramos’s increasing knowledge of ethnography and the political events taking place in Brazil. By quite literally comparing notes, Price-Mars and Ramos became central in establishing not only traceable, cultural links to Africa, but important figures in the codification of New World Africanisms, working to distinguish those traces particular to their respective countries, an endeavor which spilled into both the artistic and political worlds. By reexamining the foundations of such cultural markers and thereby providing them a deeper significance, the initiators of autoethnography in Brazil and Haiti helped to
recuperate folklore and Afro-American religions from the curiosities made of them in exploitative and sensationalist travel accounts and called for an in-depth understanding of their relevance.

As we have seen, particularly with the works of the Regionalists and the *Indigénistes* who took their cues from the social sciences and more specifically ethnography, the search for a “normative role model” gave rise to a romanticization of the backlands dweller, the peasant as representative of a longed-for authenticity untainted by European modernization. This idealized type resided at the margins of the larger society, whether in terms of the locale, lifestyle or language. For those social scientists and writers of Haiti and Brazil, interested in an alternate to the European ideal, the peasant represented that untainted part of the collective consciousness immune to the influences of the metropolitan centers.

For the Indigenists and Regionalists, a trip to Brazil’s northeast or Haiti’s interior mountains and valleys became a rite of passage, a sort of passport to a world that the city dwellers who read these works found less familiar to them in some ways than the societies encountered in the novels imported from Europe or the mimetic domestic products they consumed. Writers such as Roumain, Amado, Queiroz and Cinéas sought a cultural synthesis by looking to rural character types in a milieu distinct from the urban metropolises. They valorized those segments of the population long deprecated by the proponents of the progressive model, most notably the State and the Catholic Church. And, paradoxically, while they imbued the figure of the *paysan* and the *sertanejo* with an essentialized, idealized cultural identity, they also found the State culpable for maintaining the rural population in the deplorably backward conditions they encountered
in their version of fieldwork. The State viewed the stubborn conservatism of the peasant as a significant impediment to national progress and took measures, as we saw in chapter two, to redress the issue.

The Modernists, no less embattled than their Regionalist and Indigenist counterparts, engaged in genre-rupturing appropriations, recombining ethnographic, historical, political, linguistic and religio-mythical elements. This allowed them to move from universal constructs toward a cultural specificity, endowing their works with symbols and codes identifiable, to varying degrees, with a particular place. In other words, where one can point to novels in several countries that portray the peasant or rural dweller in the backlands as a figure of authenticity, *le Mât de cocagne* is uniquely Haitian, just as *Macunaima* is uniquely Brazilian. In the Indigenist-Regionalist model, the reader is asked to figuratively enter the text and temporarily inhabit the world of the *sertanejo/paysan*. In the Modernist model, it is the reader’s experience outside of the text that allows one to break through the esoterism with varying success and decipher its codes.

The general malaise with early anthropological practices in no way detracted from the recognized value of ethnological study. By charting such concepts as authenticity, assimilation, hybridity and marginalization over the decades, we can trace the evolution of theoretical models for approaching cultures, as Yoshinobu Ota points out:

...the so-called post-modern critique in anthropology had, it seemed to me, thoroughly worked over the concept of culture, as wedded to a discourse of authenticity, for its tendency toward being totalizing, essentialistic, and local. The critique had suggested various alternative conceptions of culture in terms of its being fragmentary, hybrid, and translocal. In other words, an image of hermetically sealed symbols had been replaced by that of porous (“import-
export”) translocal practices. Remaining sympathetic to such a critique, I also feel it has left untouched another aspect of a discourse of authenticity, the aspect directly related to a constitution of the anthropological self coded doubly as a subject and an object of investigation (Ota 2002, 62-63).

Rereading the work of Ramos and Price-Mars comparatively through the prism of autoethnography provides insights into the doubly-coded self; we perceive the mechanisms at play in the dynamic between individuals, collectivities, governments and the Church in the formation of a cultural identity that is tied to the nation.

This contextualization of culture sought by writers and social scientists alike has given rise to a continuous and evolving search for expression that seeks to achieve equilibrium between collectivity and individuality, an endeavor whose complexities are evident in the multitude of manifestations generated by the very attempt to achieve it. In his study of literary representation and the reader, Wolfgang Iser articulates a perspective that seeks to address the intricacies involved in the exchange between the written text and the reader:

To conceive of representation not in terms of mimesis but in terms of performance…This archaeology of the act of representation begins at a layer that I shall call the doubling structure of fictionality, produced by the fictionalizing acts of the literary text. […] The act of selection which is integral to fictionality is a form of doubling […] The more one text incorporates other texts, the more intensified will be the process of doubling induced by the act of selection. The text itself becomes a kind of function, where other texts, norms, and values meet and work upon each other; as a point of intersection its core is virtual, and only when actualized – by the potential recipient – does it explode into its plurivocality (Iser 1989).
The Indigenist-Regionalist model heavily incorporates ethnographic and social science texts in focusing the reader’s attention on those aspects the writers have determined as being of cultural relevance and that they choose to highlight. A reader who has never seen an ethnographic monograph will still find the regional works accessible, particularly with the prolific use of footnotes and glossaries that accompany the narratives. With works such as *Le Mât de cocagne* and *Macunaima, Désounen, Como era gostoso,*, the plurivocality that Iser points to is dependent on the “potential recipient’s” own capacity to pursue the doubling through the reduplicating layers and intertextual references which come from more than the ethnographic monograph: the myth, the folktale, the news item, the fairy tale, oral or contemporary history, etc.

This effect of “plurivocality” is also applicable to film, where one could argue that *Divine Horsemen* and *O Pagador de promessas* are closer to the Indigenist-Regionalist model, while *Como era gostoso o meu francês* and *Krik?Krak!*, because of the insistent and prodigious use of cinematic and printed intertextual references, will allow for multiple readings and are thus post-modern in their presentation and in their provocation of the audience, reminding us of Rouch’s insistence on active, rather than passive viewing. It is up to the spectator to then go about “filling in the gaps and sorting out the ambiguities of knowledge according to certain shared inferences, expectations and anticipations” (Rappaport & Overing 131). The knowledge of context has significant implications for the spectator, as a film such as Diegues’s *Quilombo* shows. The narrative is straightforward in its recreation of the rise and fall of the maroon society of Palmares yet knowledge of Brazil’s history, recently emerged from a military dictatorship at the time of the film’s release, provides access to another possible reading, as Cristina Duarte
points out: « Le film [Quilombo] renvoie à la situation politique du Brésil... au moment de l’ouverture politique, avec la libération des prisonniers politiques et le retour des exiles » [The film Quilombo harkens back to the political situation of Brazil...at the time of new political freedom, with the liberation of political prisoners and the return of exiles] (C. Duarte 173).

Contemporary developments in the study and functions of visual ethnography call for a revised understanding of what is considered a narrative film and what is a documentary. Furthermore the distinctions between this latter and the ethnographic film are perhaps not as clearly defined as one might believe, given the expanded domain of contemporary ethnography. An ever-increasing number of films are highlighting the hybrid constructions that have given rise to such terms as Rouch’s “ethnofictions” and the more recent “mockumentaries” and “docufictions.” Rouch himself points to the difficulty in keeping narrative and documentary film separate: “I think there are two kinds of truths: dramatic truth and documentary reporting, but pure documentary is very rare, and maybe it’s inevitable that a film have some drama in it” (Rouch 1978). In his book on ethnographic film, Karl Heider posits that “the task of ethnography is to achieve a truthful and realistic description and analysis of cultural and social behavior” (Heider 1976). In terms of visual anthropology, it is my firm belief that this task is not exclusive to the ethnographic documentary (a deceptively vast genre); as we have seen here narrative films are fully capable of “realistic” and “truthful” portrayals of culture precisely because those terms are so highly subjective.

Whether we are dealing with a documentary or narrative film, a structure is imposed by the process of editing which conforms to the filmmaker’s conceptualization
of the overall project and its dissemination; there is always an audience in mind. Unless one is aiming for the apparently chaotic style of avant-garde cinema, a continuous narrative is constructed by juxtaposing whichever images the filmmaker/editor choose to place in a given order which is meant to be read or deciphered by an ideal spectator. The ability of film to reach and to provoke wide audiences is of great value in debates and studies of cultural identity, a fact wonderfully articulated by American philosopher and film scholar Stanley Cavell: “[T]he great and still-enigmatic art of film, whose history is punctuated, as that of no other, by works, small and large, that have commanded the devotion of audiences of all classes, of virtually all ages, and of all spaces around the world in which a projector has been mounted and a screen set up” (Rothman 2005, xiv).

One of the premises of this work has been an attempt to understand the ways in which Brazil and Haiti occupy a space of difference in the Western imaginary and how the writers, social scientists and filmmakers confront the persistent image of “otherness” and particularization that outsiders construct of them without exoticizing or romanticizing this difference. Believing that working in a comparative manner would provide key insights into the development of cultural identity, I have traced the beginnings of consciousness-raising in these two nations and the emerging autoethnographic projects that brought to fruition important movements and significant developments both at the local level and on the international scene.

It is my view that there is much more work to be done, in looking at Haiti and Brazil in comparison to each other including but beyond the tendency to look at African-American religions. I also feel strongly that film provides a unique format for studying the collective cinema of these two nations, particularly in looking at the manners in
which they problematize our understanding of genre. With the effects of an ever-encroaching globalism, the idea of a cultural identity tied to the nation and codified in iconic symbols is being challenged through the phenomena of migration, global markets, the expansion of media and technology and ever-evolving processes of creolization.
Appendix:

The Dialogue [following is a transcription of the dialogue from Raoul Peck’s Désounen which is spread out over the course of the soundtrack.]

One day, on a deserted road a peasant encountered Death.

-Honor to you Death said to him.
-Respect to you replied the peasant.
-Peasant, asked Death, what are you doing here on my path? How come you are still among the living of Morne Saline? Don’t you know the marching band from Morne l’Hôpital is out looking for you everywhere, going round and round the cemetery?

The peasant could not answer Death. He tried to explain to him that in his book, the dead and the living were one and the same. He said a terrible misfortune had befallen them. He said the dead were complaining about the living, many of whom were thought to be already dead. He said above all that before embarking on his final journey he needed to record the testimonies of the living. Still followed by Death, the exhausted peasant stopped on the beach to get back breath. Death kept telling him over and over the future was not that essential. The peasant wondered why he was always thirsty.

One day on a deserted road the peasant was dragging Death behind him. The peasant told Death that he found him unjust and irrational. Death sneered and told him it was part of his job. The peasant berated him for forgetting those who’d gone to the other side of the waters. He told him that at a wake too many seats were left empty. He told him that Madame Kléber’s son was too young to die. That Clément only wanted to visit Miami and return. But Death sneered and told him again it was all part and parcel of his job.

One day, the Peasant met Death under the Grand Mapou of the Last Judgment.
-Honor to you, Death said to him.
-Respect to you, replied the Peasant.
-Peasant, asked Death, how many shipwrecks have you counted today? Am I to wait for you much longer?
-Times are hard replied the Peasant. There is much confusion. The stories of the survivors weigh heavy and stop me from leaving.

Death told the Peasant he’d understood. He told him God knew how to give, but not how to share. He told him God made the world in seven days and no one dared tell him since he’d made a mess of it. He told him that in the cemetery in Port-au-Prince, even he found it hard to find his own people.

-I had a dream Baron Death. I dreamed of a fishing boat for Arisnel; that Pierre Ronchard would become a lawyer and Gerlinde a nurse. I dreamed that one day Madame Kléber will go on a plane; that trees will grow again in Petit Paradis and animals will return. I have a dream said the Peasant, a poor man’s dream; a dream of a man from an underdeveloped country, as they call us, from the other side of the waters.
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