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## My encounters with Ruth Landes\*

Mariza Corrêa\*\*

First, I'd like to thank you for inviting me here today: I have a very strong emotional and intellectual relationship with Bahia and it's good to be back here with friends.

We meet here to talk about Ruth Landes. I think that I have written two texts that present what I know about her. This one, which is the preface to the second edition of her book *The City of Women* (Landes, 2002), and in another that is now being published as a book - and I don't think it's necessary to repeat here what is in those texts. But I would like to take advantage of this discussion to emphasize some things that were not said, or were said in passing, and to recount my encounters with Ruth Landes.

Starting from the beginning: it's curious that I discovered Ruth Landes, and then a book with her testimony about her research in Brazil (*Women in the field: anthropological experiences*, edited by Peggy Golde, 1986), in the 1970s, in the United States, and just before I thought about becoming an anthropologist. I sometimes wonder if these two texts weren't an unconscious reason why I decided to study anthropology when I was lucky enough to move to Campinas a year or two later. I re-encountered Landes in Peter Fry's courses on religions of African origin and fell in love with the book, which I also discovered had been translated into Portuguese. I then forgot about it for a few years until I began my research on Nina Rodrigues, when I read the book again, still in the context of the discussion on the religious field, but with a new discovery: Arthur Ramos' "falseta", the title of the article in which Édison Carneiro (2010) wrote about Arthur Ramos' persecution of Landes.

At the time of my fourth meeting with Landes, I was researching the history of anthropology in Brazil and collecting testimonies from Brazilian anthropologists or those who had worked here during the period when our discipline was formed. That's when I met Thales de Azevedo and so many other dear people, many of whom are no longer with us. Leni Silverstein, who was then in Brazil doing research in Bahia, suggested I write to Landes and gave me her address in Canada. I wrote to her, and she replied. Our correspondence was short, three letters from me and three from her, but her letters show how vividly she remembered the time she spent here, the people she met, and especially the persecution she suffered from Arthur Ramos and Melville Herskovits, who she speaks about in the first letter. These letters are so vivid and fierce that I didn't realize at the time that they were written by a woman who was almost eighty years old.

I, then a little more than half her age, was very involved in issues of university administration and research into the history of anthropology soon took a back seat – creating damage I still intend to repair at some point. And it was only later, that I reread her book once again, now from a new perspective, when I discovered that her work was being revived for the history of anthropology and feminism because of her dedicated interest in women in her research - the book *The Ojibwa Woman* (Landes, 1969) was published the same year she arrived in Brazil, 1938.

But this 'new perspective' gave me a feeling of discomfort that I couldn't quite define, and it was only when I put it back into the context of its time, the moment of institutionalization of studies on "the negro" in the United States and Brazil, the 1930s and 1940s, that I realized why I was so uncomfortable. There are three main points on which she relies, and they are also the points I would like to emphasize because I don't know if they have been sufficiently explained in the texts I mentioned

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\* Translated by Jeffrey Hoff.

\*\* *In memoriam* (1945-2016). Corrêa was founder of the Núcleo de Estudos de Gênero-Pagu and professor in the department of anthropology, at the Universidade Estadual de Campinas (Unicamp), Campinas, SP, Brazil. Editor's note: The list of bibliographic references does not constitute part of the original text, as it is a conference presentation. It was added at the insistence of ScIELO as a condition for publication.

earlier and because I believe they give a good idea of the position occupied by Ruth Landes in the history of anthropology in Brazil.

The first point concerns precisely her 'recovery' by gender studies, from a feminist perspective, which puts Landes' status as a woman, and her emphasis on the *mães de santo* (mothers of saints) in Candomblé *terreiros*, in the foreground. This reading erases, deletes, the crucial point of Arthur Ramos' criticism, which was the scandal caused at the time by the public claim that there were homosexuals in the cults in Salvador. Her emphasis on the pre-eminence of *mães de santo* in Candomblé was certainly nothing new: since the time of Nina Rodrigues, whose disciple Arthur Ramos considered himself, and whose work he was the most zealous guardian of, the names of *mães de santo* exceeded those of *pais* [de santo] (fathers of the saint) in candomblé *terreiros*. Just look at the list of names cited by Nina in *O animismo fetichista* (Rodrigues, 1935).

Arthur Ramos himself had already quoted, in one of the books he wrote before Landes came to Brazil, a newspaper article in which the journalist unmasked a *mãe de santo* from a *caboclo* cult in Bahia, showing that she was a man dressed as a woman. And by saying that the presence of homosexuals as *pais de santo* (fathers of saints) in the rites was significant in *caboclo* cults, and reduced in candomblés, where *mães de santo* reigned, Ruth Landes was following the canonical version of the scholars of the time: *caboclo* cults were a misrepresentation, a degeneration, of candomblés. In other words, the feminine principle was in its place in traditional cults and displaced in *caboclo* cults.

Why, then, was Landes' argument scandalous? Because, for the first time, the argument was expressed in its entirety, showing a local scene that was not homogeneous, not 'African' and therefore not in line with the version that was then dominant in studies on Black Brazilians: who were portrayed as a population of slave descendants, more black than mestizo, more African than Brazilian - and certainly patriarchal by transference, even if this was a subliminal aspect of the issue. The portrait painted by Landes in very vivid tones contrasted with the Black man on paper, the historical Black man, who was the focus of attention for researchers at the time, broadening the range of possibilities for research into the religious field which, since then, has been perceived as much more heterogeneous than that of her description. In addition, by showing in her descriptions what Nina Rodrigues had said years before - "in Bahia all classes are apt to become Black" - she also removed the Black from a sub-culture in which some scholars insisted on keeping them, thus creating a kind of "reserve" for their research.

This first point concerns the rupture of a scientific paradigm that was itself being constituted as such at the time, and has consequences for the second point that I want to emphasize here: the field of study of race relations that was being constituted at the time in Brazil was of central importance to the field of study that was also being constituted in the United States, and the latter, in turn, had a strong resonance in the tropics. In both the Brazilian and American cases, there were at least two factions in conflict, with Melville Herskovits occupying a polar position in relation to Franklin Frazier and each with their own sphere of influence. By allying himself with Herskovits, Arthur Ramos was also taking a stand in the international debate and lending his prestige as a leader in the Brazilian field to the American researcher. The latter, in turn, by supporting Ramos, brought the weight of North American academia to back him up and also gained a position in a country that was strategic for research into race relations at the time - as it still is today. In entering this binational field, Landes allied herself with Frazier in the United States and with Heloisa Alberto Torres in Brazil—with the director of the National Museum being structurally at the pole of opposition to the professor of the College of Philosophy, who sought to redefine anthropological studies in the country based on studies "about Black people" and not, as was the Museum's line, ethnological studies. In other words, Ruth Landes' work and the criticism she suffered, allows a reading from the perspective of the history of science, or intellectual history, which can be broken down into several levels: the more local level, in Salvador, where Landes allied herself with the young journalist who was also a kind of client of Arthur Ramos; the national level, in which intellectual leaders disputed the definitions of the sciences that professed and occupied strategic places that made their influence resonate in the country - publishing houses, professorships, government commissions, relations with international agents - and, finally, the

international level, where these disputes were expressed and gained new resonance - the case of UNESCO research, for example.

Finally, the third point is still obscure and could be expressed in the question - who invented the Bahian woman as a symbol of Brazilianness? I'm not going to say it was Ruth Landes, because that would be simplifying a long historical process and reducing an issue that should be analyzed to simple praise. But Landes certainly played an important role in this process. As she describes in the book, when she left Bahia, practically on the run from the political police, she managed to smuggle all her research material onto the ship that would take her to Rio - including a batch of Bahian cloth dolls made by the mães de santo she had interviewed and become friends with. As a local production, these dolls deserve a separate study, which has yet to be done. A year after she left Bahia, Heloisa Alberto Torres, perhaps inspired by Landes' collection, commissioned another collection of dolls from the same mães de santo in Bahia, with the help of Edison Carneiro, this time to exhibit them at an International Exhibition in Lisbon. The dolls are still at the National Museum, where they were returned because their presence, like Landes' work, also provoked a scandal - this time expressed by the gentlemen of the Commission in charge of managing the Brazilian part of the exhibition - who didn't want to see Brazil presented "as a country of Blacks and macumbas". A similar reproach was heard by a young Portuguese woman when she appeared on another international stage, the New York Fair, dressed as a Bahian and singing sambas that would present us as "sensual mestizos in whose midst only the stirrings of carnivalesque concupiscence reign". The girl was Carmen Miranda, whose show Ruth Landes attended, according to a letter she wrote to Heloisa Alberto Torres. The Bahian dolls, like the theoretical disputes surrounding the definition of Black people in Brazil, also made a long journey from their local scene — undergoing inspection nationally at the National Museum and Rio de Janeiro venues — to the international stage. Perhaps it's no coincidence that the beautiful cover of the first edition of this book is a stylized Bahian woman in an illustration by Marius Lauritzen Bern.

There is also a footnote worth noting: by calling her book *The City of Women*, isn't Landes paying homage to the first feminist writer in the West, expressing her modern bias in the title itself? Christine de Pisan's book, published in the 14th century, was called *Livre de la cité des dames*.

I'll stop here, but I'd like to say that I met Ruth Landes again in the pages of Sally Cole's beautiful biography of her, to be published this year [*Ruth Landes and American Anthropology*], and I'm meeting her again today, here, with you. I hope to meet her again many times. Thank you very much.

Mariza Corrêa, March 2003.

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