

## Anthropologies and Nation-building in Cuba and Haiti (1930-1990)

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This article sketches the outlines of a comparative history of social and cultural anthropology in Cuba and Haiti and examines the role played by the discipline in the construction of the national cultural identities of both countries. [1] While the nineteenth century and the first decades of the twentieth century have been the subject of valuable analyses (briefly presented here), the pivotal period from the 1930s to the 1970s, during which the discipline was consolidated and institutionalised, deserves to be further explored in all its complexity. Past and ongoing studies produced *in* and *on* Haiti and Cuba, many of which are little-known to a broader audience, shed light on the complex circulation of people, ideas, paradigms and concepts. These various processes have led to the interplay between these two 'national anthropologies' (Gerholm and Hannerz 1982) and European, Central and North American ones. The period was indeed marked by the displacement of many Cuban and Haitian intellectuals to France, the United States and Mexico, many of whom were engaged in the struggle against their respective governments. From the 1940s onwards, many European intellectuals, for whom Haiti and Cuba were to constitute favoured fields of study, also went to the Americas.

Our aim is to analyse the emergence of both regional and transnational networks, namely

scientific, political, literary, and artistic movements that claimed to be anti-imperialist, socialist or communist. They played a significant role in the spread of anthropological knowledge in Cuba and Haiti, which in turn contributed to redefining national identities. Particular attention should also be given to the categories of Otherness in the region (including the United States). In sum, we will reflect on the peculiar interweaving of anthropological thought and political discourse, as revealed by the Haitian and Cuban cases.

## Beyond Race: In the Name of Nation-building

The last decades of the nineteenth century in Haiti and Cuba were witness to the emergence of a conception of humankind that gradually freed itself from a focus on physical dimensions and moved towards the reintegration of history and linguistics into the analysis of social relations. As elsewhere, contributions from sociology, psychology, archaeology, and ethnography (particularly Africanist studies) helped consolidate this trend. In its various forms, the new anthropological orientation was to play a considerable role in the formation of Haitian and Cuban national identities. The multifaceted and engaged representatives of this movement forged a specific 'anthropological culture' (Krotz 1993: 10).

In the Haitian context, this anthropological thought was first constructed against the denigration of the 'Black Republic'. Although Haiti had been independent since 1804, its sovereignty was still challenged by the great colonial powers (Joseph 2017). As evidenced by the intellectual production in Haiti during the 1880s, the affirmation of racial dignity was then a political issue. Louis-Joseph Janvier (1884), Anténor Firmin (1885), Duverneau Trouillot (1885) and Hannibal Price (1900), to name but a few, are the inescapable, emblematic national figures whose committed scientific discourse sought to assert the academic and political legitimacy of black individuals (Douailler 2018; Carrazana et al. 2020). Cuba, at that time, was still under Spanish colonial rule and was struggling to emerge from slavery, which was not abolished until 1886. However, against a backdrop of armed struggles for abolition and independence, this period was also a founding moment. Although the activities developed within the Sociedad Antropológica de la Isla de Cuba (Anthropological Society of the Island of Cuba), established in 1877, focused on the question of race with the avowed aim of 'whitening' the population to avoid its supposed degeneration, some authors nevertheless emphasised the risks of political and identity dissolution that such a posture implied. Ahead of their time, they posed the question of nation, and with it the question of citizenship, as being 'beyond' race. [2] José Martí, with his famous essays such as *Nuestra América* (Our America, 1891) or *Mi raza*, (My race, 1893) is the most illustrious representative of them. Yet the voices of this generation were not heard. [3]

Anthropological thought in nineteenth-century Haiti – the 'long nineteenth century' (Hector & Casimir 2004), stretching from the revolutionary struggles started in 1791 to the US occupation of the country in 1915 – also derived its legitimacy from a combination of the 'racial question' with the 'social question'. The twentieth century also opened with a gradual but steady advancement of the culture of the 'people' – descendants of African slaves, who

constituted the majority of the population, living in the “pays en dehors”, the rural world and the suburbs of Port-au-Prince. During the first decades of the twentieth century, some thinkers from the educated minority stood out from an ‘elite’ shaped by the European civilisational model. They carried political and intellectual thought, and with it the new national imagination; gradually they discovered, invested in and instituted an ethnological heritage which could be considered to be contained in the very culture of this people: ‘standing courageously against the work of ethnomorphosis undertaken for decades, they will, as new builders of consciousness, try to shape a new national soul for us’ (Oriol et al., 1952: 18). In the 1920s, national dignity, which was then emphasised, was not so much a matter of ‘racial dignity’ as of ‘culture’, which guaranteed ‘authenticity’. Jean Price-Mars (1919, 1928, 1929) is the best-known figure of this so-called ‘folkloric’ movement, which he launched and long influenced. [4]

Cuba was liberated from Spain in 1898 and entered a semi-protectorate regime, which was punctuated by several US military interventions. Some of those for whom ‘racial dignity’ gave substance to national dignity seemed to be definitively seized by an obsession with whitening. In a ‘counter-self’ dynamic (James Figarola 1972, 2001; Prieto Samsónov 2015) inherited from the colonial past, the new elites supported a migration policy which was favourable to Europeans, participated in campaigns to ‘de-Africanise’ the population and abstained from condemning the massacre of insurgents from the Partido Independiente de Color (Independent Party of Colour), in 1912. Their actions were reinforced and legitimised by the local development of criminal anthropology, which evolved towards a Cuban version of eugenics: homiculture. [5] However, from the 1920s onwards, another path gradually emerged in the anthropological field around the Sociedad de Folklore Cubano (Cuban Folklore Society) and its founders (Fernando Ortiz, Emilio Roig de Leuchsenring, José María Chacón y Calvo). As in Haiti, this movement was in constant interaction with politics and faced with a comparable ‘work of ethnomorphosis’. Its representatives took a particular interest in folk practices and folk knowledge, defending cultural dignity in order to reconstruct the Cuban national imagination. (A good example of this movement is the journal *Archivos del Folklore Cubano*, launched in 1924). Interest in oral traditions and in religious and musical practices of African origin, which had hitherto been the subject of strong discrimination, was at the heart of its commitment, in close collaboration with the nascent Afro-Cubanist movement, initiated, among others, by Alejo Carpentier, then a musicologist (1933; 1946; see also Rodríguez Beltrán, 2012), or with the “mulata” poetry of Nicolás Guillén (1930; 1931).

In Haiti, as in Cuba, this interest ‘is articulated from a perspective that seeks to integrate all the original components of the population into the political nation’ (Byron et al. 2020: 279). It was also influenced by foreign movements such as primitivism, “black art” (*art nègre*), the Harlem Renaissance and surrealism, forging close and fruitful links with their main actors (Célius 2005b; Moore 1997; Argyriadis 2006). Both Fernando Ortiz and Jean Price-Mars were animated by a comparative perspective, inspired among other influences by cultural morphology (Mancini 1999) and the works of leading anthropologists with culturalist and

diffusionist views, who associated 'man with his culture, with a civilisation, and not only with his nature and his race' (Laurière 2015: 19). Ortiz and Mars attempted to grasp the 'soul' of their respective people, formed as it was by multiple cultural contributions, and to identify the common points in the Caribbean or, more broadly, in the Americas.

## Folklore and Nationalism

In Haiti, however, in the following years, the definition of the intellectual, political, aesthetic and social value of 'authenticity' was to emanate from several diverging standpoints. Figures such as Jacques Roumain or Philippe Thoby-Marcelin, or the group known as 'Les Griots', sometimes followed diverging pathways and did not necessarily agree with each other. Against the backdrop of anti-imperialist struggles, these intellectuals renewed their nationalist views in different ways, even if they were all involved in the consolidation of a new national cultural identity. As the US occupation of the country (1915-1934) came to an end, the development of self-reflection born of the so-called 'Indigenist' movement was nourished by different sources: new socialist political orientations (Charlier 1934; Romanian 1934 ; Beaulieu 1942); the message of the 'École des Griots', with its homonymous journal, in which figures such as Carl Brouard, Lorimer Denis, and François Duvalier emphasised the singularity of the 'Haitian race' between 1938 and 1940; or even ideas linked to the fear felt by cultural others in the face of the craze with 'the Africas of Haiti'. [6] In this framework, self-examination at the heart of the intellectual and political processes in question gave way to enduring modes of both identification and distancing (Laëthier 2019). Power was shared in the arena of ideological struggles and combined with a colour code that was, ultimately, instrumentalised. Thus, the development of a national feeling based on this peculiar self-perception, which both united and divided intellectuals, is one of the specific features of Haitian ethnology. Here, contrary to what happens elsewhere, 'the other' is the self – otherness is in turn selfhood (ipseity) and identity – but sometimes plays out in contradictory ways.

In Cuba, as the 1930s opened with the revolutionary struggles against the dictatorship of Gerardo Machado, anthropological reflection focused more than ever on the 'Afro-Cuban' field, particularly around Fernando Ortiz, who founded the Sociedad de Estudios Afrocubanos (Society for Afro-Cuban Studies) in 1936. But Cuban anthropologists were also sensitive to a sociological approach to class relations; their focus on the question of cultural heritage was therefore inseparable from their attention to underlying social inequalities (Laëthier et al., 2020). At the dawn of the following decade, this trend led to what might be described as 'hope for ethnogenesis'. This is illustrated by the fertile notion of transculturation, developed by Fernando Ortiz in his major work, *Contrapunteo cubano del tabaco y el azúcar* (1940b). This was, on the one hand, a conceptual tool for analysing the construction of a common identity resulting from 'contacts between civilisations'; on the other, it was a genuine political project, an aspiration that the various forms of mixing and transformation should one day, for the country as for the rest of the world, lead to 'neoculturation' (Ortiz 1973 [1943]: 188; see also 1940a). In contrast to the 'counter-self', Cuban

anthropology was therefore established as an anthropology 'of the self', 'for the self' and 'for the Other'. The affirmation of a 'Cuban commonality' was to be tirelessly put at the service of the aspiration to a 'common humanity'.

Both in Cuba and Haiti, under different modalities, the anthropologies 'of the self', 'for oneself' and 'for the Other' sought to reaffirm a 'national cultural identity' that legitimised and ultimately created certain objects as 'cultural signs': race, nation, religion, folklore and the rural world. These years, which were crucial in the development of the discipline, were marked by singular figures, pioneering texts and original debates, now well documented in terms of their national framework. However, they also had an influence on the broader regional and international framework of anthropological debate. The 1940s was a pivotal period, marked first of all by the Second World War and the exile of many European intellectuals to the Americas, when various Cuban and Haitian thinkers, engaged in the struggle against their respective governments, found refuge in President Lázaro Cárdenas' Mexico. It was also a time when regional networks – particularly between Haiti and Cuba – and international networks woven over the previous decade began to be consolidated. Little research has been done on these inter-American networks, at once scientific, political, literary and artistic, which claimed to be anti-imperialist, socialist or communist. The considerable role they played both in the institutionalisation of anthropological knowledge in Cuba and Haiti and in the redefinition of national identities and categories of otherness throughout the region, including the United States, [7] remains to be explored. These momentous anthropologies had their own ways of 'doing' and 'telling'. Notwithstanding their 'national' character, they were intended to contribute methodologically and conceptually to international scientific debate, to put forward potentially universal tools. In this way, the collection of folklore, ethnographic research and sociological approaches to class relations, to social inequalities and the shifting political contexts in which they developed were intertwined.

The complex intellectual exchanges within these networks transcended national issues, and the anthropological debates that stirred Cuba and Haiti attracted an increasing number of foreign researchers. At the dawn of the 1940s, Havana was the scene of the Second Conferencia Americana de las Comisiones Nacionales de Cooperación Intelectual (American Conference of National Commissions for Intellectual Cooperation). During this time, against a backdrop of anti-racism struggles, major figures from the Caribbean and North and South American social sciences met and Port-au-Prince became a hub for intellectuals who were members of international scientific, artistic, political and cultural networks. [8] The 'national culture' aroused interest well beyond the country's borders: ethnologists, artists associated with surrealism, philosophers of *négritude*, but also of 'Afro-Cubanism' in particular, met and a crossroads of knowledge was formed (Gobin & Laëthier 2018).

Within our research theme, our aim is the reconstruction of national and international networks that were both intellectual and institutional, political and sometimes militant: we also intend to study certain figures whose career paths were built through several

geographical spaces, disciplinary, academic and other fields of action, whether political, artistic or even religious. In Haiti, anthropological reflection on the heterogeneous configuration of society and the elaboration of disciplinary knowledge remained closely intertwined with civic discourse and political action. Certain authors – most notably Jacques Roumain, who then forged close links with Cuban intellectuals – were thus experimenting with forms of writing that went beyond the limits that the discipline was, nevertheless, in the process of setting for itself. At the same time as anthropological knowledge became institutionalised in the 1940s (Célius 2005a, 2005b) a process of scientific, cultural and identity reassessment of all manifestations worthy of being considered fully 'Haitian' was underway. Meanwhile, the national scene was animated by discourses in which anthropology and politics were intermingled (Byron 2014; Byron & Laëthier 2015). In the following decade in Cuba, we have the emblematic case of Lydia Cabrera (1953, 1954), who combined an empathic approach with 'experimentation with innovative stylistic forms [...] on the borders of literature and ethnography' (Gobin 2020: 447). She contributed to the design of the ethnographic rooms of the National Palace of Fine Arts and her writings and personality contributed to arousing the interest of foreign anthropologists, such as Alfred Métraux and Pierre Verger, in the Afro-Cuban field. Other lesser-known authors such as Juan Luis Martin (1930), Romulo Lachateñéré (1939), Jorge A. Vivó (1941), or Calixta Guiteras (1952) also explored different styles, methods, disciplinary combinations and extra-national contexts. These Haitian and Cuban polymaths had an emotional bond to their subjects, which enhanced their creativity and made a difference. Their singular approaches are, from this point of view, still under-analysed. (Laëthier et al. 2020).

## Anthropology, the Safekeeper of National Identity?

The 1950s and 1960s, which marked a major political turning point for both countries, also deserve a more in-depth analysis as regards the development of their respective anthropologies. Paradoxically, continuity rather than rupture has to be taken seriously into account.

In Haiti, as the discipline became institutionalised with the founding of the Institut d'ethnologie and the Bureau d'ethnologie in 1941 at the instigation of Jean Price-Mars and Jacques Roumain, there was new debate on the idea of race. The attention paid to the uses of the term 'race' in the discourse and practices of Haitian ethnology was heightened in the context of the rise of *noirisme* as a national political ideology. From this point of view, the 1950s was a pivotal period whose interest lies in its contradictions. While the country emerged as an object of study beyond national concerns, in connection with the development of an international intellectual network, the rhetoric of 'race-nation' was reinforced. The intellectual and political value attributed to the 'race-nation' was not so much cultural 'authenticity' as national 'authenticity'. [9] Our analyses aim to question this crucial formulation, which was at work in the development of anthropological knowledge, but also in connection with sociology, introduced a few years earlier under the influence of US teachers. [10] We aim to explore the ways in which the epistemological importance of the

'race-nation' derived from the internal power relations built. [11]

With the establishment and consolidation of François Duvalier's regime (1957-1971), the 1960s opened a special period for the discipline, as Duvalier presented himself as a *président ethnologue*. He was indeed the author of several texts on Haitian identity (co-written with Lorimer Denis) and honorary director of the Bureau d'ethnologie until 1971. Under his political and intellectual authority, the debates on the idea of race, which had been divisive in previous decades, gave way to discussions on the import of each individual's colour, namely its impact in politics, within the elites, and between the elites and the people. However, if the interest in anthropology/ethnology – in that it would be likely to guarantee the specificity of Haitian identity – was shared, disagreements and even opposition (Piquion 1966, 1967; Price-March 1967) appeared in the explanation and understanding of the social and cultural differences of those who were supposed to constitute the 'Haitian ethnic group' (Georges-Jacob 1941, 1946). The analysis of these various interpretations will shed light on the driving forces and implications of the new political and symbolic space made possible by anthropological self-evaluation. The growing influence that the discipline exerts in various fields – including the curricula of other social sciences – was a prelude to the lasting link it would maintain with Duvalier's dictatorship. The study of these connections will reveal a period in the history of anthropology, more broadly in the history of Haitian society, that remains unconsidered (Byron & Laëthier 2015).

In Cuba, despite some attempts to institutionalise social and cultural anthropology by several of its promoters [12] and a few, timid incursions into higher education [13], the discipline had not yet managed to consolidate itself in the 1950s. This was a convulsive period marked by the struggles against the dictatorship of Fulgencio Batista. With the advent of the revolution in 1959, the ideas of Ortiz and the Afro-Cubanist [14] vision found a new environment in which to thrive. Research institutes were created with a focus on living folk practices that were previously marginalised, and the aim of making "folklore" work in the service of 'total national cohesion' (Núñez González 2015). Founded in 1959, the Folklore Department of the National Theatre of Cuba, in close collaboration with the Dance, Theatre and Music departments (Roth 2016), trained a whole new generation of young researchers who published in the journal *Actas del Folklore*. It was dissolved and replaced in 1961 by the Instituto de Etnología y Folklore (Institute of Ethnology and Folklore), headed by Ortiz's disciple and ethnomusicologist Argeliers León, who was the first Cuban anthropologist to set foot on African soil: in 1964 he went on an ethnographic mission to Ghana, Mali and Nigeria, collecting objects for a future ethnographic museum. The same year, with the support of UNESCO, the Centre for Africanist Studies was created within the Institute of Ethnology and Folklore.

Against the backdrop of the Cold War and at a time when new movements of international solidarity were emerging – Tricontinentalism, pan-Africanism, indigenous socialism – and seeking to propose different ways of thinking about humankind, Cuban researchers were forced to detach themselves from their Caribbean and Latin American interlocutors in order

to invest in other areas of exchange, namely in Africa and Eastern bloc countries. Many aspects from this intense period remain to be clarified, in particular (and this is far from being an exhaustive list) the following: the renewal of the links between history and anthropology (Barcia 2014; Argyriadis 2020); the specific relationship that was then created between ethnography, the world of the arts and social action (García Yero 2017; Menéndez 2019); and the attempts to completely reshape the discipline from the 1970s onwards (through Oscar Lewis's abortive major survey or later the mobilisation of researchers for the elaboration of an Ethnographic Atlas based on the Soviet model, among other inspirations).

These are some research issues when studying the links between anthropological thinking and the processes of building national and cultural identities in the Haitian and Cuban contexts. This presentation can hardly exhaust the multiple anthropological discourses that took shape in, around and beyond Cuba and Haiti. These are unevenly documented periods that are far from being explored in all their complexity. Space is now being given to contributions that will enrich this comparative reflection on these national anthropologies by investing in analysis, from the 1930s onwards, of the sources, orientations, challenges and contradictions of a discipline which, beyond the national contexts in which it is embedded, is defined, for Cuba and Haiti, by a shared framework.

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[1] This research is part of a programme conducted by the Jeune équipe haïtienne associée à l’international (JEHAI IRD/FE-State University of Haiti), *L’ethnologie en Haïti : Écrire l’histoire de la discipline pour accompagner son renouveau* (coordinated by J. Byron and M. Laëthier.) and by the JEA1 (IRD/Instituto Cubano de Investigación Cultural Juan Marinello/Instituto Cubano de Antropología), *L’anthropologie sociale à Cuba. Reconstruire le passé pour cimenter le futur (Social Anthropology in Cuba. Reconstructing the past to cement the future)* (coordinated by N. Núñez González and K. Argyriadis.). It also took place within the Laboratoire mixte international (LMI, Joint International Laboratory) ‘Mobilities, Governance and Resources in the Mesoamerican Basin’. It gave rise to several publications and various activities led by Kali Argyriadis, Jhon Picard Byron, Emma Gobin, Maud Laëthier and Niurka Núñez González, with the support of IRD, URMIS and CNRS. See the book *Cuba-Haïti: Engager l’anthropologie. Anthologie critique et histoire comparée*

(1884-1959) (Argyriadis, Gobin, Laëthier, Núñez González, & Byron 2020). The text proposed here takes up some of the lines of research outlined in the introduction to this book (Argyriadis, Gobin, Laëthier, Núñez González, 2020). See Núñez González, 2020.

[2] José Martí and Antonio Maceo converged at that time, along with other contemporary thinkers – Haitians such as Anténor Firmin, Puerto Ricans such as Ramón Emeterio Betances or Eugenio María de Hostos, Dominicans such as Gregorio Luperón or Francisco Henríquez y Carvajal – towards a project for a Caribbean Confederation uniting people and nations beyond phenotype, ethnic origin and historical and linguistic singularities. See Firmin (1910), Estrade (1982), Fajardo *et al* (2020).

[3] Among these Cuban authors, reflecting a wide variety of positions, are Antonio Bachiller (1887), Rafael Serra (1907) and Juan Gualberto Gómez (1890). On the anti-racism and anti-racialism of José Martí (1893; 1895), see also Ortiz (1942), Lamore (1986), Ibarra (2009: 123-124) and Estrade (2017 [1984]: 236-239).

[4] On the history of ideas and the development of the discipline during this period, the works of Célius (2005a, 2005b, 2014, 2018), Charlier-Doucet (2005), Ramsey (2011) and Byron (2014) should be mentioned.

[5] In this regard, see Ortiz (1906), Roche Monteagudo (1908), Hernández Pérez (1910) and Castellanos (1916). On these currents we can also consult Beldarraín (2006), Argyriadis & Laëthier (2020).

[6] These years remain marked by the interest in an 'endogenous otherness' (ethnic, social) which leads to ethnographic work around certain 'people's' practices, particularly those related to Vodou and orality. However, this interest, which also led to the institutionalisation of ethnology and attracted intellectuals and foreign artists, linked to surrealism or negritude, was strongly questioned by part of the elite, the authorities and the Church at a time when a new anti-superstitious campaign was being launched (1939-1942).

[7] Several Haitians thus went to the United States to complete their training in anthropology thanks to scholarships obtained from American foundations.

[8] These include the sojourns of Katherine Dunham (1935), Alfred Métraux (1940), Michel Leiris (1941), Harold Courlander (1942), Rayford Logan (1942), Dewitt Peters (1942), Nicolás Guillén (1942), Alejo Carpentier (1943), André Breton (1944), Léon Gontran Damas (1944), Aimé Césaire (1944), Jacques Maritain (1944), Roger Bastide (1944), Maya Deren (1944).

[9] Cf. the writings of Lorimer Denis (1953) and those he signed with François Duvalier (1944, 1948, 1952).

[10] As shown by ongoing research into the archives of Roland Devauges, a member of the academic mission of the French Institute of Port-au-Prince between 1951 and 1955 and a teacher of sociology and ethnology (at the Institute of Ethnology, the Faculty of Law and the École normale supérieure in Port-au-Prince).

[11] For the Haitian context, we will focus on the important figure that was then Emmanuel C. Paul (1949, 1956; 1959a; 1959b, 1962).



[12] Besides the institutions already mentioned, the National Archaeology Commission was created in 1937 by presidential decree. It became the National Council of Archaeology and Ethnology in 1942 (chaired until 1949 by Fernando Ortiz).

[13] Ortiz gave courses in 'Cuban ethnography' in 1941-1948 and 1959-1951 as part of summer schools at the University of Havana (University Institute for Scientific Research and Improvement).

[14] This period, however, marks a very clear break in the case of Lydia Cabrera, who went into exile in the United States and only republished on the basis of her ethnographic surveys of the 1950s from the 1970s onwards, with Pierre Verger's constant encouragement.