

## 'No Sun Helmets!' Melville & Frances Herskovits in Brazil

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Between 1935 and 1943, the city of Salvador, Bahia received different degrees of attention by a large number of foreign scholars and intellectuals, all of them impressed – if not seduced – by the “magic” of this city, largely the result of its black popular culture: Donald Pierson (1900-1995), Robert Park (1864-1944), Ruth Landes (1908-1991), Lorenzo Dow Turner (1890-1972), E. Franklin Frazier (1894-1962), Stefan Zweig [1] (1881-1942), Frances Shapiro Herskovits (1897-1975) and her husband Melville Jean Herskovits (MJH) (1895-1963). Salvador even became the site of the battle between two different perceptions of black integration in the United States and of the place of Africa in this process. Four important US scholars carried out fieldwork in Salvador, Bahia, in the years 1940-42: E. Franklin Frazier, Lorenzo Dow Turner, and Frances and Melville Herskovits. Frazier and Turner trailed the path already laid by Donald Pierson and Ruth Landes in 1936-38. Herskovits and his wife Frances relied on a different and somewhat more conventional network, interwoven with the local political and intellectual elites. Each of them had a special encounter with Bahia and such experience was to be relevant for the rest of their career, even if none of them actually came back to that field as each of them had planned. Franklin Frazier, the most famous black sociologist of the time, who had already published *The Negro Family in the United States* in 1939, was locked in an argument with the equally famous anthropologist Melville Herskovits on the “origins” of the so-called black family and more generally on the weight of African heritage on black cultures in the Americas (see Mintz and Price 1992). To make things even

more complex, they shared part of their informants: the *povo de santo* (the members) of the same *candomblé* houses of worship in Salvador – mostly the prestigious and “traditional” Gantois *terreiro*, of the Ketu/Yoruba nation. In between the two of them was black linguist Lorenzo Dow Turner, who already had considerable experience in researching African survival in Black speech in the US and would later publish his seminal book on African influences in Gullah (Turner 1949), the language spoken by the people of the Sea Islands on the coast of South Carolina and Georgia in the United States. Turner was a friend of Frazier, but his scholarly theories were closer to those of Herskovits. Frazier came from Howard University, Turner from Fisk University and Herskovits from Northwestern. Frances had already co-written books with Melville and had accumulated considerable fieldwork experience in Surinam, Dahomey and Haiti.

Frazier and Herskovits's opposing visions reached a large readership through the publication in the *American Sociological Review* of an article by Frazier, followed by a response by Herskovits and a counter response by Frazier (Herskovits 1943d; Frazier 1942 and 1943). The debate highlighted interesting aspects regarding the way anthropology, different from sociology, defines itself as a discipline, as well as the construction of Afro-Brazilian studies as an academic field. It is the story of tensions between a black American sociologist and a white Jewish American anthropologist, both using the services of Brazilian intermediaries and gatekeepers, who were themselves interested parties in the contention. [2]

Already at that time the style and language of sociologists and anthropologists (and linguists) were different – drier or soberer for the former and emphatically romantic for the latter – related to radically different approaches to the same phenomenon, in this case, the “origins” and causality of black cultural forms in the New World. Was black culture and family structure the result of slavery and later the adjustment to poverty? Or was it the result of Africanisms, the survival of traditional African forms of life and culture adapted to life in the New World? Beyond these two approaches there were, of course, different perspectives on the antiracist struggle as well as very different types of networks in Brazil. I will focus here on a number of less known aspects of the Herskovitses' field trip to Brazil and their entanglement with Brazilian scholars, intellectuals and politicians as well as, more generally, with the making of anthropology in Brazil.

The archive concerning the Herskovitses in Brazil is generous. Even though documents and correspondence of the Herskovitses are scattered across at least five places and three institutions (Schomburg Center, Northwestern University and Smithsonian Institute – especially the Anacostia Museum, National Anthropological Archives and Museum of African Art), and some documents – mostly concerning the 1960's and McCarthyism – are still under embargo at the moment of writing, there is such a plethora of documents, diaries, field notes, photographs, sound recordings and newspaper clippings that one cannot complain. The reasons for that are manifold: the sheer length of the stay in Brazil (during 12 months, in fact their longest field trip ever; see Price and Price 2003), the painstaking fashion of keeping and storing receipts, clippings and various types of documents that seems to be typical of the

couple, together with the fact that they worked very much together and kept correspondence with a large number of Brazilian intellectuals, politicians and, to a lesser extent, candomblé people for decades. Moreover, we shall see that Melville, when compared with Franklin Frazier and Lorenzo Dow Turner, who did research in Brazil one year before (Sansone 2011), had considerably more financial and political backing for his international and institutional projects and he became one of the main foreign patrons – and maybe a gatekeeper – of Brazilian anthropology.

Melville Herskovits' concern with Brazil appears quite early in his career, possibly as early as 1930, and is obvious in his correspondence with Rüdiger Bilden and, later, Donald Pierson, then a PhD student at the University of Chicago under the supervision of Robert Park and Anthony Burgess. Pierson wrote to suggest the “apparent lack of racial prejudice in Brazil” as a field of study. Herskovits wrote back enthusiastically and arranged to meet Pierson. Soon Pierson, who was busy studying Portuguese and reading anything on the topic he could find in the US, sent Herskovits a translation of the list of contents of Nina Rodrigues' *Os Africanos no Brasil* (Pierson to MJH May 10 and August 28, 1934; MJH to Pierson May 15, 1934). In the same year MJH wrote to Gilberto Freyre and the secretary of the first Afro-Brazilian Congress in 1934 in Recife, José Valladares. In 1936 he wrote to the secretary of the second Afro-Brazilian Congress that was to be held in 1937 Salvador, Reginaldo Guimarães. He sent a paper to be read at each of the congresses and saluted the event. In 1935 he started corresponding with Arthur Ramos and exchanged articles and books with all the aforementioned Brazilian scholars and in 1935 (Guimarães 2008), stated that he wanted to improve his Portuguese beyond being able to read it. In many ways, Brazil was already on his horizon a few years before he started preparing his application to the Rockefeller Foundation to being able to carry out research in Brazil. The Herskovits' three-decade-long engagement with Brazil would continue until their death, Melville in 1963 and Frances in 1972.

The Rockefeller Archive Center (RAC) contains many very important documents on Melville Herskovits and on his successful application to the Rockefeller Foundation (RF) for a grant for one-year field of work in Brazil. [3] In the RAC there is also material on the years immediately afterwards (1942-45), which shows how the research in Brazil consolidated his career in the US and was, in fact, a stepping stone toward the establishment of African studies proper at Northwestern University. The collection also documents the consolidation of his role as transnational gatekeeper in both the fields of African American and, later, African studies (Jackson 1986; Gershernhorn 2004).

Herskovits started contacting the RF about a possible trip to Brazil in the latter half of 1940. By April 1941, his application for a USD 10,000 grant was ready. He sensed that the RF was interested in the promotion of Latin American studies, as well as the promotion abroad and especially in Latin America of social sciences developed in the US. [4] Herskovits had extensive research experience in the Caribbean and Africa; with the exception of Cuba, Brazil was the only important country of what today we would call the Black Atlantic in which he had not yet been able to carry out research. The grant he was now applying for would help fill

this gap. Herskovits' poor command of Portuguese was an issue, and Joseph Willits, the director of RF's Division of the Social Sciences, suggested in a very polite manner, that he familiarize himself with that language before making his trip. Herskovits did not take his advice. [5] On June 11, the grant was approved regardless.

In the eight months before the departure, Melville and Frances prepared their trip very carefully. They started improving their Portuguese, selected the right way to travel (this would eventually be by cruise ship, since flying with Pan Am would be almost twice as expensive), arranged travel insurance, purchased field work and recording equipment, inquired about local weather and health conditions, made hotel reservations in Rio (the luxurious hotel Gloria) and Salvador (the average-priced Edith Guesthouse, Avenida Sete 242), and wrote many letters to Brazilian colleagues and authorities.

Melville already knew personally several of the Brazilian contacts he was writing to announcing his trip and making arrangements to meet, such as Gilberto Freyre and Arthur Ramos, because they had been in the US over the last years, or because they already corresponded and had common interests and networks. On June 9 and 18 letters were sent to Ramos, Freyre, Roger Bastide, Pierson, Charles Wagley, Heloísa Torres, Edgar Roquette-Pinto, Cecília Meireles and Mário De Andrade. [6] The Rockefeller Foundation, moreover, had an office in Rio, which paved Herskovits' way in Brazil with letters to the Brazilian Foreign Office (Itamaraty). On January 5, 1942 Melville wrote to the Minister of Foreign Affairs, Temístocles da Graça Aranha, thanking him for the contacts he had arranged for the couple in Brazil, especially in Bahia. Ahead of his trip Herskovits received quite some inside information on the – then relatively small – Brazilian social science community. Dr. Austin Kerr of the Rockefeller office in Rio was one of his “inside informants”:

A few days ago I called on Dona Heloisa and had a most interesting conversation with her. She knows Dr. Arthur Ramos very well, but their fields of activity are rather separate. She says Ramos has an extensive collection, but that is personal. The University has nothing. A few days ago, Dr. Ramos founded an Anthropological Society here in Rio. Dona Heloisa could not attend the meeting (she really could not) but it was reliably reported that Ramos and one of his students made some rather puerile remarks in their speeches. Roquette Pinto attended and perhaps Gilberto Freyre. You will have learned from Ramos much about what he has done in Bahia, but Dona Heloisa told me that she has some information about people in Bahia that she believed Ramos did not have. (An African weaver and wood carver, I believe). I believe that you will find it profitable to make use of the laboratory facilities at the Museu Nacional. They are probably rather primitive, but the best available. I would suggest that you not hook up too exclusively with Ramos. Also I would suggest that instead of collecting for Northwestern, the chief aim be to collect for institutions here, donating all artifacts to institutions here and taking with you only duplicates. This is real good-neighborliness (Kerr to MJH, July 28, 1941) [7].

Melville answered on July 30:

Many thanks for your letter with its realistic appraisal of a situation that is not much different from what I have encountered in two other parts of the world. ... I am hoping to get to know all my Brazilian colleagues. I take it for granted that there are tensions wherever personalities are involved, and the one thing I do not propose to do is to get mixed up in the resulting situation. Many thanks also for the suggestions as to hygiene and clothing. ... I am also bringing a little more quinine than you indicated, since once we get to work we will probably be living as close to the group we are working with as possible, even though it may mean conditions that are somewhat primitive. No sun helmets! I got cured of them in Trinidad (MJH to Kerr, July 30, 1941).

Herskovits also prepared the audiovisual part of his future fieldwork quite carefully. He purchased a camera, an Eyemo 35 mm film camera, 80 rolls of Eastman Kodak film and 8000 feet of video camera film. He also travelled with a heavy case with 200 blank discs for audio recording, which were made available for free by the Music Division of the Library of Congress, on condition that a copy of the future recording be deposited in the library. Melville asked both the Music Division and the Rockefeller office in Rio to assist him with the clearance of the equipment and film material – in those days both were subject to severe and expensive custom restrictions in Brazil. So, Melville complained to Edward Waters of the Music Division that

I recently had a word from Turner ... that the Brazilian law required one copy of each recording made in the country to be deposited with the Central Archives before the original record may be exported. I am sure that the fact that I will be recording for your Archives will not make it difficult to have this law waived, provided that ... copies of my records are to be made for return to Brazil (NU, MJH to Waters, August 5, 1941).

A few days before departure Harold Spivacke, chief of the Division of Music, proposed a less formal approach:

It is possible of course that any attempt to export the records may bring down such regulations on your head but if you simply take them out with you or send them by diplomatic pouch I think we can avoid them. At any rate you shall have your letter [of credentials from the Librarian] and I am sure we can overcome the obstacles as they arise (Spivacke to MJH, August 20, 1941).

For recording music, Herskovits tried to secure the assistance of his friend ethnomusicologist Allan Lomax, of the Music Division, starting from January 1942. Lomax was quite interested in doing research in Brazil (NU, MJH to Spivacke June 16, 1941).

In his fieldwork in Brazil the Herskovits planned to use the recordings they had made in other places across the Black Atlantic: "I am taking a number of my Trinidad recordings to Brazil, and also some commercial records of West Africa, since all of this will be useful to stimulate singers and also to document discussions of the general problem of the comparative study of Negro music" (MJH to Spivacke, August 22, 1941). In the same letters he

asked for some copies of Haitian music records from the Lomax collection, adding that “The songs should be African in type, preferably with drum rhythms”. The plan to facilitate the recognition of Africanisms in Brazil through music from other locations in the Black Atlantic seems obvious.

Herskovits also wanted to use the film camera: “Besides my regular ethnological work and recording, I am hoping to be able to get motion pictures of various aspects of Brazilian Negro life, which, like the other material, should tie in with the data from earlier trips” (MJH to Lomax, July 15, 1941). Melville sought support for this from the coordinator of commercial and cultural relations between the American republics of the Council of National Defense. However, Kennett MacGowan of the Motion Picture Section reacted in very negative and racist fashion:

I am very dubious about our being able to find money for films of the Brazilian Negro cult-groups. In general, we have had to steer clear of giving too much publicity to the more backward peoples in the Latin American Republics, much as we would like to make records of value anthropologically speaking. (MacGowan to MJH August 2, 1941).

It seems that this tough response owed a lot to the turmoil caused by Orson Welles’ filming of the Rio Carnival, which had been supported by the Council. Herskovits answered swiftly defending his plans in his very polite but firm style:

The statement of policy you make is an interesting one, but I wonder if it might not be worthwhile to probe further its validity. I doubt very much whether pictures of Negro dancing during carnival time, or even recordings of some of the magnificent songs and dances that are found in the macumbas of Rio and the candomblés of the north, would, if presented sympathetically, and as the art they actually are, be in any way unacceptable to the Brazilians. However, I suppose these matters of high policy are determined for you, and I don’t imagine that such a point as this needs to be argued with you. Nonetheless, as an expression of opinion, it might be worthwhile to you in the event the matter is raised sometime later (MJH to MacGowan, August 13, 1941).

Despite the negative response, Melville went ahead with his plans to get motion pictures and for that matter asked for the support of the US ambassador Jefferson Caffery in order to inform the proper authorities in Brazil about these films to facilitate their entry, arguing that they would be used solely for scientific purposes (MJH to Caffery, August 12, 1941).

In October 1941, soon after Frazier’s four-month fieldwork and the slightly longer fieldwork by Turner, the Gantois candomblé cult house received a visit from Melville Herskovits, in the company of his wife Frances and six-year-old daughter Jean. As mentioned, Herskovits planned his trip carefully – as he had done for other fieldtrips abroad – and, after perusing the various options, booked a cabin on a Moore-McCormack ship from New York to Rio de Janeiro. The Herskovits family left on August 29 and arrives in Rio on September 10. [8]

Africanist and folklore scholar William Bascom took Melville’s position at Northwestern



during the latter's leave. His correspondence with Melville is revealing of the first months of the couple's stay in Brazil (NU, MJH, Box 16 F 5):

We've had a mad ten days of it since we landed; meeting people, finding our way about, learning Portuguese, and planning work ahead. I made my debut with a paper in Portuguese last Friday night; it was rather tiring reading it, but people apparently understood me – at least they laughed in the right places and not in the wrong ones. Rio is as lovely as it is supposed to be... Everyone is extremely cooperative, from the moment we got here and found that our luggage was to go through customs without inspection to my recent interviews with one of the ministers when it was arranged to have letters introducing me officially to the Interventores (appointed governors) of the various States we'll work in. We have not had the chance to do any anthropology yet, but there'll be plenty of chances for that... Chuck Wagley is here... Ramos and his wife are fine and want to be remembered; Freyre has turned out to be a very nice person also (MJH to Bascom, 22 September 1941).

A week later Melville asked Bascom to send copies of his books to Cecilia Meireles, and the syllabi of some of his recent courses to Donald Pierson and Ciro Berlinck of the pioneering Escola de Sociologia e Política in São Paulo. Brazil seemed to be a promising place for research:

Things are beginning to open up in interesting fashion... not far from where we are going (in Maranhão) there are a number of quilombos, villages of descendants of escaped slaves not unlike Bush Negro communities [in Surinam], all waiting to be studied. I have also been shown a magnificent document of the 18th century – constitution of an association of Negroes who were Mahis from the North of Dahomey; and their officers had to be born members of that tribe, born in Africa. The material here is so rich one scarcely knows where to start... (MJH to Bascom, October 6, 1941).

Soon Melville started sending books printed in Brazil to colleagues in the US:

In a few days I shall have sent to you two copies of Nina Rodrigues' 'Os Africanos no Brazil' [with z]. I would be interested in Disu [presumably a Nigerian student] checking the proverbs on pp. 200-220, and in seeing what he knows of the validity of the presentation of Yoruba mythology, as given on pages 322 ff. I will also send Goncalves [Gonçalves] Fernandes 'Xangos de Recife' in which you will find Yoruba songs.... If these are in archaic 'Nago' it would also be interesting to know (MJH to Bascom, October 30, 1941).

On December 15 Melville asked his secretary at Northwestern to send a set of his books and reprints of his articles to José Valladares and Father Fidelis Ott in Salvador:

The first one is a young chap, the director of the Museum here, who is working with us as interpreter on loan, so to speak, from the state government in return for the training he will get; the second is out of the Middle Ages – a Franciscan Friar who has studied anthropology, is interested in the life of the Negroes here (especially their religion!) and is

going to teach in the new College they are setting up... Bahia is a charming city, with an excellent climate – and a housing shortage. We are still in the pensao (boarding-houses) we landed in on our arrival, and may have to stay here, especially since our being here will not interfere with our working. We have not found materials as close to the surface since we have worked in Guiana – but there is plenty down farther that will need probing. [9]



Image 2

Melville J. Herskovits in the Congregação May 6, 1942.  
On his right Thales de Azevedo, Frances Shapiro  
Herskovits and Isaías Alves.

Source: Acervo do Museu de Arqueologia e Etnologia,  
Federal University of Bahia.

On November 5, 1941, Herskovits wrote a fairly long letter to Willits with an interesting comparison of the intellectual climate at the University of São Paulo (USP) and at the Escola Livre de Sociologia with that of the Faculdade de Filosofia in Rio. According to Herskovits, the latter, even though more established, was less intellectually stimulating and less vibrant. Willits answered promptly on November 17, remarking that the contrast between São Paulo and Rio was interesting and needed further exploration. On December 12, Herskovits wrote about a process he deemed promising: the establishment of the Faculdade de Filosofia da Bahia, a college of liberal arts, under the leadership of Isaías Alves – a man Herskovits held in high esteem. The main problem was the absolute lack of funding. The government provided the building, but the rest was not being provided for – not even the salaries. Most professors had to make their living elsewhere. Many were medical doctors and their earnings came from their practice. This lack of full-time dedication was a major problem in Salvador as elsewhere in Brazil. One can imagine, said Herskovits, what such an institute would be if it could benefit from a few men of the standing of Gilberto Freyre, then the dean of sociology in Brazil. [10]

Towards mid-March, the Herskovits, after almost two months in Rio and six spent in Bahia, start making plans for the rest of their stay [11]:

It seems almost impossible that we have been in Bahia four months...  
work has gone very well indeed – the amount of material we have got is



appalling, and we shall spend most of the time in S. Paulo typing our notes in duplicate, so that one copy can be sent by mail and one retained by the Embassy, with the original flying with us. [12] Recording has gone excellently ... I am hoping that the Library of Congress will get an authorization to send the records back by air express.... Our plans are as follows: Recife May 14, Return to Bahia June 14, after a few days to Rio until July 1, then to S. Paulo until August 10 (MJH to Ward March 23, 1942). [13]

Melville prepared his one-month sojourn in Recife with the usual care. He asked for the US Consulate in Salvador to communicate with the consulate in Recife to inquire about a good boarding house and wrote to the minister Graça Aranha on April 16 asking for the 'usual' letter of recommendation. On April 22, Graça Aranha sent him copies of the letters he had sent to the *interventor* of Pernambuco and the mayor of Recife. Arthur Ramos had also sent letters of recommendation to Recife.

After completing his fieldwork in Bahia, Herskovits was nominated honorary professor of the recently opened Institute of Philosophy of Bahia. The institute dedicated its opening and first public event to the conference given by Herskovits "Pesquisas etnológicas na Bahia" held at 8 pm on May 6, 1942 in the main hall of the Instituto Normal (*A Manhã*, April 30, 1942). [14]



Image 1

Newspaper *A Manhã* (Rio de Janeiro), July 5, 1942, p. 3.

On June 20, the 42 professors of the Senate of the Institute unanimously nominated Herskovits the first honorary professor of the Institute. [15] Since Herskovits had already left for Rio de Janeiro on his way to the US, the honorific title was delivered to Mr. Reginald Castleman, consul of the US in Salvador da Bahia, who later forwarded it to Herskovits (MJH to Alves, July 26, 1942). The delivery of the title occurred in a public ceremony on August 21 at the Instituto Histórico e Geográfico da Bahia and was offered by Thales de Azevedo to Castleman (Alves to MJH, August 5, 1941). [16]

As soon as he was back in Evanston, Herskovits wrote a batch of letters of thanks for the assistance he received in Brazil, such as to *Interventor* Landulpho Alves, Consul Castleman,

Manoel de Menezes Silva and Edgar Santos (Faculdade de Medicina da Bahia), Arthur Ramos, Isaías Alves, Graça Aranha, Thales de Azevedo, Heloísa Torres, Sérgio Buarque de Holanda, René Ribeiro, Gonçalves Fernandes, Ciro Berlinck and Donald Pierson. The correspondence shows that the recent development of social science institutes in Brazil, in the years 1940-42, especially in Rio and São Paulo, like the Instituto de Altos Estudos Políticos e Sociais in Rio and the Escola Livre de Sociologia in São Paulo, was closely observed by the US consulates. The Rockefeller Foundation, specifically Joseph Willits, was quite interested as well. Herskovits reported about these centres and suggested to Willits that it would be of interest to the Rockefeller Foundation to invest also in centres in the North of Brazil such as in Recife and Salvador. These two centres had thus far received much less funding. [17] Herskovits was quite critical of the new Institute in Rio, and especially of its dean, Salviano Cruz, who had stated he had the support of the Rockefeller Foundation and the Social Science Research Council of the US, which was untrue. [18] It is obvious that Herskovits had his agenda and liked certain people more than others, and expressed his preferences.

His report on fieldwork in Brazil was very much appreciated by Willits, who stated, “It is excellent and will be very useful to us. It states very clearly the possibilities and limitations of social sciences grants in Brazil”. [19] In somewhat of a response, Herskovits advised, “... treat it as a confidential document. Some of the comments mightn’t be so good for the Good Neighbor Policy!” [20]

In December 12, 1942, Herskovits wrote to Willits applying for funding for two “brilliant” Brazilian scholars – Octavio da Costa Eduardo and René Ribeiro – and suggested a substantial donation for the new Faculdade de Filosofia da Bahia, which had greatly impressed him. Alas, on December 16, Willits answered, “Our news is averse to any start with general support to the institution in Bahia. Humanities have one case up for support for fellowship from Bahia, but have no idea that there will be chance for project there any time soon”. From this correspondence, one gathers that such funds for Bahia would never come from the Rockefeller Foundation. Herskovits kept on sending his publications on Brazil and a copy of the recordings he made in Brazil to the RF until 1958, when he published a piece on Brazil within a book in honour of the late Paul Rivet. It included a chapter on the social organization of candomblé and would be his last publication on Brazil.

From 1943, Herskovits tried to raise financial support for the Institute of Philosophy of Bahia, which would later merge with the Federal University of Bahia, founded in 1957. For some reason, this application was not successful. As we will read later, he kept supporting this institute by donating books to its library, both his own publications and other books of general interest that could be shipped by Northwestern University. Herskovits and his spouse Frances, in fact the co-author of much of his work, would never get to publish the book on Brazil they proudly announced in their interview with the Rio daily newspaper, *A Manhã* on July 5, 1942. [21]

The war effort was an important part of the general context. As most US anthropologists (Stocking 2002), Melville was much taken by this effort. He was also a staunch supporter of

the Good Neighbor Policy. He wrote to Heloísa Alberto Torres, director of the Museu Nacional: “We have found a most striking increase in the interest in Brazil and things Brazilian in the year we were away – I don’t think it will be long now before people in this country know that Brazil speaks Portuguese instead of Spanish!” (MJH to Torres, September 30, 1942). He also wrote to Graça Aranha:

We were flying out of Brazil when the declaration of war was promulgated, and we arrived home to sense the warm reception which greeted the entrance of Brazil into the war as an active ally. There is no question in mind that the work of your Division of Intellectual Cooperation is very considerably responsible for this development (MJH to Graça Aranha, September 30, 1942).

Such renewed interest in Brazil raised hopes of support for the social sciences in Brazil: “The interest that, in America, exists nowadays in Brazilian matters is corresponded on our side. Believe me. For this reason, I remind you again of the possibility the library of our Institute receives some of the numberless publications produced over there...” (Alves to MJH, October 13, 1942). Melville Herskovits answered that helping the Faculdade when the opportunity should arise had not been forgotten (MJH to Isaías Alves, February 4, 1943).



Image 3

Honorary professorship in anthropology, offered by the Faculdade de Filosofia to Melville J. Herskovits.

Source: Acervo do Museu de Arqueologia e Etnologia, Federal University of Bahia.

The success of their field trip to Brazil, however, did not only depend on the support the couple got from Brazilian colleagues, intellectuals and even politicians. One good reason for the success of his fieldwork, argued Melville, was that the informants were actually happy with the anthropologists’ interest in them: “Afro-Brazilians feel happy with receiving people who know Africa and that can utter opinions, with proper grounding, on their way of life, their worldviews, and who were familiar with their Gods and found their cult understandable and familiar” (MJH in *A Manhã*, July 4, 1942). Also the key informants played a big role in such success: “It would be difficult to find anywhere a group of people more

congenial than those I have met in Bahia, and I hope that at some time I shall have the opportunity of reciprocating the many favors I received there" (MJH to Thales de Azevedo, September 30, 1942). The correspondence is full of evidence of the closeness between the Herskovitses and the Bahian intellectual and political elites: "I wish to acknowledge the wonderful courtesy we received... during our stay in Bahia... Salvador became to us not merely a city where we were able to carry out interesting research... in the future we will look back with great pleasure to these months we spent in Bahia " (MJH to *Interventor* Alves, published in *Diário da Bahia*, November 10, 1942), and:

While the people of our city are thrilled with excitement because of the victories achieved by the weapons of the democracies in Africa, I had the pleasure to receive your letter of October 30... I was pleased to read that you still plan to bring me to the USA. I wait, enchanted, for this opportunity that, if put in practice, would put me in touch directly with the Masters of this great nation and would make it possible for me to learn that which thus far I have had to learn by myself, with the ensuing shortcomings (Gonçalves Fernandes to MJH November 9, 1942).

Or:

Your information that you are trying to arrange it for me to study for a period in your country woke up old hopes to be able to complete my studies in the US.... You have seen our deficiencies: professors, libraries, organized services, means, academic spirit and so forth. That is why every Brazilian wants to go to study in America (René Ribeiro to MJH, November 14, 1941).

Valladares's acknowledgement of the grant he got from the Rockefeller Foundation (RF) with the support of MJH is especially interesting on account of the place of *orixás* in it:

I have just received a message by the Rockefeller, informing that I was given a grant. My thoughts of gratitude are in the first place for the dear professor Herskovits. The second place is shared by Berrien and the *orixás*, especially Omolu my father to whom I offered a few bags of popcorn (Valladares to MJH, August 3, 1943).

Herskovits invited a number of Brazilian scholars and helped many more of them in their process of applying for grants, with positive reviews of the application, recommendation letters or just pulling strings. Eduardo da Costa, René Ribeiro and Ruy Coelho did their MA or PhD in anthropology in the US thanks to Melville. [22] The same applies to Valladares, who managed to conclude his degree in museum studies in the US and Mexico thanks to Herskovits' support in his application for a grant from the RF.

Valladares spent one year in the US in 1944. Herskovits even suggested a topic for the dissertation in museum studies, with the help of Ralph Linton, for Valladares' wife Gizella. She did this while in NY with her husband, studying at the Brooklyn Museum and doing fieldwork later in Bahia on Negro folklore by collecting folktales, as had been done in the US, but was thus far unexplored in Brazil (MJH to Valladares April 11, 1944). Herskovits had

recommended Gizella to his friend and colleague Ralph Linton and was therefore also her mentor. Gizella would eventually obtain a MA in anthropology at the University of Columbia in 1948 with a dissertation on Afro-Bahian folktales [23] which was favourably reviewed by Ruth Benedict, and became the anthropologist in the Museu da Bahia as well as a lecturer in anthropology at the Faculdade de Filosofia, where she substituted Professor Ott for a while.

After Melville and Frances moved back to the US, Herskovits' connections with Bahia were largely kept through José Valladares and his wife Gizella Roth Valladares. The Herskovits and Valladares families stayed in touch on very friendly terms for decades. In fact they had been close already from the mid forties: when José got engaged to Gizella Roth, her father wrote to Melville to inquire about the seriousness of the exchange: "I trust you will understand my desire to know as much as possible about my future son-in-law in view of the fact that Bahia is such a great distance from New York" (Herman Roth to MJH, April 28, 1944). José was the director of the Museu da Bahia. Valladares, as he liked to be called, kept the Herskovitses informed about three topics during a long period of time: the candomblé community, the Faculdade de Filosofia and the upcoming Federal University of Bahia (UFBA), and general politics with special reference to education.

While the creation of the Faculdade had seen Valladares as one of its most enthusiastic supporters, the creation of the UFBA found him much more critical:

I have no doubt that something with the name University of Bahia will be inaugurated, but I do not know whether it will be a serious matter, matching the name, or one of those arrangements that bring with them a lot of honor, many responsibilities, but no means or faculty to perform a good job (Valladares to MJH March 16, 1946).

On March 29 Herskovits replied that he hoped it would be "*uma coisa séria*", and would make the work of the Faculty of Philosophy effective. Valladares, however, kept complaining:

A few days ago was created the University of Bahia. At, long last. In my opinion ... it leans towards bureaucracy.... Everything is done under the supervision of the Institute of Medicine and we have no reason to expect much from these professionals who pose as scientists, these native '*faux monnayeurs*' (Valladares to MJH 22 April, 1946).

In terms of candomblé, Valladares sent news about the houses and the people who had taken part in the 1941 research, such as Bernardino, Joãozinho da Gomeia, and Dona Zezé, widow of Manuel Peres, who opened a new and very large cult house in the neighbourhood of Engenho Velho in 1947. If Valladares is Herskovits' messenger to the candomblé community, he insists on calling Melville "babalorixá [24] Mel" – possibly hinting at Melville's "magical powers". Such powers, argued Valladares, had been confirmed when Melville manage to arrange for him a special Rockefeller grant for his museum studies in 1944. [25] In Salvador Valladares as well as the Alves brothers and Aristides Novis had been indeed of great help for Melville and Frances' fieldwork. For this reason, Castleman, in his speech for the Senate, stated that Melville had the help of Valladares as assistant and constant companion and the

Education and Health Secretary as friend and advisor (Castleman to MJH August 21, 1942).

Herskovits' attitude to these Brazilian scholars, who were almost all white, would differ considerably from his attitude to black scholars in the US, whether junior or senior. As shown by Gershenhorn (2004), Herskovits dealt with most or all funding agencies available for Negro studies: Phelps Stokes, Rosenwald, Board of Education, American Council of Learned Societies, Guggenheim and Rockefeller Foundation. Even though in recent times critical voices have been raised against Herskovits' attitude as regards US black intellectuals and, to a lesser extent African scholars (Gershenhorn 2004; Allman 2020), in his correspondence he seems generally supportive of black intellectuals, such as Du Bois and his project for an *Encyclopedia Africana*. He was, however, very selective and demanding and, as he wrote to his mentor George Seligman, had dual feelings towards black scholars in the US. On the one hand, he understood that these funds are there to help for the "negro question", which he agreed was urgent; on the other hand, he was after something else, less evident and more hidden than civil rights or space for black intellectual in the US academia: African survivals. To make things even more complex, Melville often resented that these black activists and intellectuals did not claim the issue of African survivals for their own (MJH to Seligman February 9, 1939, Box 21 F 22). In fact, by the mid-thirties, Herskovits had begun to see himself as interpreter of Africa to Afro-Americans (Jackson 1986:109). Today one could say that he felt he was a (white) hero of the Black Atlantic. Others were to join him in this function, for example Pierre Verger.

There is no need to ask whether we are enjoying Brazil.  
The tradition of visiting the north of Brazil, I am happy to say, seems to be growing, and I suspect you will be seeing more and more Americans as times goes on. My 'propaganda' for Bahia seems to be having some effect"  
(MJH to Valladares, Feb 3, 1943). [26]

Herskovits was good at both local and international networking and did this very well in Brazil. He developed contacts and preserved and nurtured them over time. [27] In Salvador, Recife, São Paulo and Rio de Janeiro, he knew who was who and was friends with the powerful in the cultural and intellectual elites. Moreover, in Bahia, besides having friends in the candomblé community, Melville and Frances were also on friendly terms with Isaías (1888-1968) and Landulpho Alves (1894-1954), Aristides Novis (1885-1953) (secretary of Education) and Odorico Tavares. Odorico Tavares was a key radio, newspaper and cultural promoter and producer in the period 1940-1970 in Bahia, closely related to Paulista media magnate Assis Chateaubriand (Ickes 2013). Tavares was a regional modernist and admirer of the "authenticity" of popular culture, which he contrasted with the elitism of the traditional Bahian oligarchy (Ickes 2013: 440; Lima 2013). He managed two newspapers, *Estado da Bahia* and *Diário da Bahia*. The former offered a weekly column to black ethnographer Edison Carneiro in the mid 1930s and reported lavishly on other regional modernists such as celebrated writer Jorge Amado, known for his communist sympathies. Tavares was convinced that by that time in Bahia the dominant class, two decades after the Modernist Biennale in S. Paulo, was eventually starting to accept the partial incorporations of symbols



and icons of black culture in the public representation of the state of Bahia. In doing so, Afro-Bahian culture became a celebrated feature of Bahian regional identity.

MJH also keeps in touch with Dona Heloísa:

Out of our Committee on Negro studies of the American Council of Learned Societies is going to come I think an Inter-American society of Negro studies, and a journal which I hope will circulate in all the Americas, and will have articles in any of the four languages. We are planning to have it published in Havana under the editorship of Ortiz. Some of us are also working toward an international conference on Africa, which should be interesting. Brazil, of course, will be represented" (MJH to Torres, May 12, 1943).

It is clear that Brazilian participation in this society is important to Herskovits: "Brazil will, we all hope, have a considerable membership in the society, since the Brazilian students in the field will naturally play an important role" (MJH to Lois Williams, May 14, 1943).

Herskovits came back to Brazil just once, for the XXXI International Americanist Congress held in São Paulo on August 23-28, 1954. In his letters to Frances he comments on this visit in detail. At the conference he met many of his Brazilian and non-Brazilian connections: René Ribeiro, Ruy Coelho, Dante de Laytano and Aguirre Beltrán. As supervisor, he also took part in the PhD committee of Ruy Coelho at the Universidade de São Paulo. At one of the dinners, while trying to regain his Portuguese, he heard of the scandal caused by the couple Gizella and Valladares. Accusing him of seducing his wife, Valladares had shot Ben Zimmerman (not fatally), a student of the Wagley's team, of which Gizella was also part. Valladares went to jail for a while and Gizella went to the United States to cool off for a few months. "Then she came back, and they are living together again! It must have been hard for Gizella", says Melville. He also says he is happy to have heard it before going to Bahia, where he had been invited to give a lecture at the Faculdade de Filosofia because Valladares was to meet him there and it could have been embarrassing otherwise. [28]

At the congress there were six women beautifully clad in traditional clothes distributing African food. Melville talked to one of them who was *filha de santo* [29] of a candomblé house in Engenho Velho. She recognized him and remembered Frances. On the way back Melville stopped for a few days in Bahia – he flew back through Recife, Dakar and Paris. He stayed at the Hotel da Bahia. Valladares made a nice study room available for him at the museum and chaperoned him across Salvador. They met several of the former informants in the candomblé community, and went to the candomblé in São Gonçalo and Engenho Velho. Melville liked the African feel of the city, which had changed little. He gave a lecture at the Faculdade, approximately on September 6, 1954. Thales de Azevedo coordinated the debate afterwards.

## Herskovits' Candomblé

During their fieldwork in Brazil and in the first period after returning to the US in 1942, the

Herskovitses were really taken by candomblé, including on an emotional level. This is confirmed by the daughter Jean Herskovits who I interviewed and told me that Melville was convinced of the power of *orixás*, which combined with his traditional Jewish superstitious attitude. He had several amulets and frequently carried one with him. He believed that there was a supernatural dimension in many of the phenomena he analysed, as can be perceived in many places in his correspondence. A letter to William Bascom is revealing: “Here is one point you can clear up – a point of considerable importance ... It concerns possession by the gods” (MJH to Bascom, August 13, 1942). In another letter Valladares provides an example of what can happen if one does not follow the limits established by your protecting “saint” (*orixá*):

On May 6 Silvino Manuel da Silva passed away. Since he was the assistant of Dr. Novis. I used yesterday’s gathering to inquire from the Secretary of Education the cause of death of our renowned alabe. He passed away in the Spanish Hospital, where he was intern, having been treated as a patient with means. He had married Mrs. Zeze in extremis. The whole treatment was paid by Dr. Novis’ purse. Upon the burial both Dr. Novis and the head of the Medical School gave a speech. (Valladares to MJH May 12, 1943).

Melville answers on May 25:

Your news about Manuel came as a great shock to both of us.... My mind wandered back to Bahia and the drama implied by your news. We shall both be waiting with the liveliest interest for the information about the gossip that is going on, and the explanation that the cult-folk is giving for this sudden death. And we have all the faith in the efficacy of your *perguntazinhas* [small and tricky questions]; we are all sure there will be a fascinating tale to be told. If you do see Zezé, do extend to her our sympathy. And tell her that Frances is writing to her. Manuel, whatever his faults – and he had many – was a person of many qualities and real power. It seems incredible that he has disappeared from the Bahian scene ... we had not forgotten Exu... (MJH to Valladares, May 25, 1943).

One more: “By reading your article replying to Frazier, I see that our late Manuel was right: Ogun is the saint protecting the professor” (Valladares to MJH October 28, 1943). As stated, Valladares was Herskovits’ guide through and messenger to the candomblé community:

...I live on, in peace with Olorum. Every now and again I meet Raimundo, always progressing. Among the other friends, I have seen only Possidonio. He invited me to visit the Xango Feast in the Oxumare house. One of those girls who did the recording was with the enchanted Iemanjá, but that day I did not see Cotinha do the mirror dance (Valladares to MJH, August 5, 1942).

Procopio, Mrs. Popó, Caboclo, Raimundo, they all inquired about the professor, madam and your daughter, and I always say that I just received a letter in which each of them is greeted individually ... Bahia is still a good land... the Eguns cult in Amoreira would be a good reason for a new fieldtrip of yours (Valladares to MJH October 1, 1942).

In another letter Valladares goes into detail about the supposed death of Joãozinho da Goméia:

Yersterday....I started a chat with that son of Omolu from the (cult house) of Engenho Velho, in the Triunfo bakery. Joazinho is alive and kicking. As regards his death, I was told by a mate of the Omolu guy, it was news spread when Pedra Preta had traveled to the inland. ... That way the hews of his death went around a lot and many people went to the Quintas (cemetery) waiting for the coffin (Valladares to MJH, November 6, 1942)

In many ways it seems that candomblé became part and parcel of the Herskovitses' life, at least for a number of years after their trip to the US. Jean told me that her parents were convinced that their lives were saved by candomblé. Melville firmly believed that the *machado de Xangô* he received from the candomblé people in Bahia had saved his life and that of his wife and daughter. When it was time to go back to the United States they were convinced not to get on that boat (they would eventually fly back to the US) by a group of candomblé priestesses who gave them a wooden Xangô axe that would protect them. The boat in which they would have travelled, the vessel SS Bill, was indeed sunk by a German submarine, and in it was lost a copy of the recordings and field notes and most of the Afro-Brazilian artifacts the Herskovitses had purchased in Brazil for the museum at Northwestern University (see MJH Papers at Northwestern University, Box 4 Folder 12). Luckily, Herskovits had kept a copy of his recording and field notes with the American Consulate in Salvador and had sent a second copy by mail to the United States. This wooden axe became a cherished object in Jean Herskovits' New York home, a bitter-sweet reminder of Bahia, candomblé and her parents.

Issues raised by Herskovits' fieldwork in Bahia were to keep cropping up for several years in his correspondence with Brazilians and US colleagues. In Porto Alegre, Melville Herskovits was impressed by the number of black people, the availability of herbs and cult objects, and the well-organized *pegis* (shrines):

They have almost as much knowledge of Africa, and as full survivals of African religious life, as they have in Bahia... There are some interesting differences – they make *filhos de santo*, and don't have *ogans*; they cut the skin of the skull rather than shave the head in initiation, the period of which is briefer; the songs are quite different; and the *nações* [ritual traditions] represented are almost exclusively Gege, Oyo and Ijesha. [30]

In the same letter Melville goes on to comment on Recife: "In Pernambuco there was nothing on the surface, due to official policy of putting down the cult. I have the impression that ... the Mahomedan elements have persisted in fragmentary form (better than in Bahia, where they had been suppressed)" (MJH to Valladares, August 14, 1942). Soon afterwards, Melville asks William Bascom for his opinion:

Here in Brazil most of the cult-initiates are women. They are called *yawos* from initiation to the end of their 7-year period, and *vodunsi* after that, when they have the right to become priests or priestesses if their *santo* [*orixá*] call them to be. In Bahia, they say that they don't like to 'make' male

initiates – a puritanical reluctance to have men and women share the intimacies of the initiatory period. In the South they ‘make’ men, because the period is shorter and the initiation can be done individually, as it is in the case of men in Bahia when they are ‘made’. However, in Bahia (but not in the South) they have an institution called the *ogan*. This is a person that goes through a rite of ‘confirmation’, relatively short, that gives him the right to perform sacrifices; these men help in the financing of the house they belong to, are called by a given god, give sacrifices to their head (*bori*), and are really important members of the cult-group. Now, in West Africa, my experience has been that there are many more women than men initiates, but it never occurred to me to find out what the role of men affiliated with the religious group might be. Can you both [Valladares and William Bascom] look into this? I suspect it might lead to something of interest, even though what comes out might be very different from the institution I’ve sketched (MJH to Bascom, February 5, 1943, MJH Papers box 27, File 11). [31]

Melville’s involvement with candomblé is so strong that in his letters, Valladares calls him repeatedly “*o reputado babalorixá Herskovits*” (the renowned candomblé priest Herskovits) (Valladares to MJH May 12, 1943). In various moments in the correspondence, Melville gives evidence that he believes in the power of *orixás* and in African deities more generally. Here is evidence of it: “I hope the new administration in Bahia will mean nothing but good things for the Museum... I am outing two particularly good African charms to work on this” (MJH to Valladares, March 29, 1947).

Melville and Frances received directly or indirectly news about the Bahia cult houses and somehow kept in touch with the field. Apart from Valladares, it was Alfred Métraux, Bastide and Pierre Verger (MJH to Verger April 27, 1948) that conveyed the greetings to Melville and Frances’ former informants. Melville kept on saying that he would go back to Bahia at some point. *Saudade* [nostalgia] was definitely part of the story. In commenting on the close and even sentimental relationship cultivated by several anthropologists with candomblé from the 1940’s, Roberto Motta saw this commitment to candomblé under a different, and more problematic, light: “It is trendy to visit a cult house, especially among anthropologists, who many times pretend they are part of the orixa religion”. The price for such a romantic consensus is that “the same interpretation tends to repeat themselves over and again” (Motta 2014: 165). There were a few exceptions, such as René Ribeiro, who, as Roberto Motta stresses, did not “get initiated in such religion. It was in the position of pupil of (psychiatrist) Ulisses Permambucano that René started to visit the xangos (cult houses), well before getting to know Herskovits”.

In a way, this near-sentimental relationship to candomblé was part of a specific ethnographic sensibility. In his interviews with Brazilian newspapers, Herskovits emphasized he was not here to study the “primitives”, but the beauty and variety of black culture in Brazil. He also proposed acculturation theory as an ideal, even though, as Anadelia Romo correctly stresses (2010: 127), his own research still searched for untouched African practices and his focus on Bahian popular culture was timeless and static rather than

directed at social change (Herskovits 1941).

## A Tale of Two Reports: One for the US and the Other for Brazil

In the MJH Papers there are two reports, one dated October 16, 1942 for the Rockefeller Foundation and a shorter one dated April 16, 1943 for the Conselho de Fiscalização in Brazil. [32] Both contain roughly the same summary of the ethnographic findings, but the first one includes a quite detailed description – a social map – of intellectual life and the social sciences in Brazil. This supplement makes it particularly important because it teases out the complete agenda of Herskovits in Brazil, which was not only ethnographic. Let us start with a sketch of the ethnographic findings, later spelled out in the several articles the Herskovitses started publishing soon afterwards.

The first report for the Rockefeller Foundation is marked as confidential. The reason for this is the double agenda of Herskovits' research in Brazil, as he candidly states right at the beginning of the text:

The first aim was to continue the progress of studies of the transmutation of African cultures in their New World environments, and the light this throws on the dynamics of culture in contact. The second was to gain insight into the intellectual life in Brazil, and to assess the possibilities for social science research, both for students from the United States, and for trained Brazilian students. This second objective ... was visualized as best approached from the angle of the contacts and relationships that a working scholar would normally have during his stay in the country (MJH Papers, Report to the RF, October 18, 1942, p. 1).

The report is further divided into sections: itinerary, research findings, the place of the social sciences in the intellectual life in Brazil, centres of social sciences teaching and research, financial report and acknowledgments.

The ethnographic details in the report take up more than ten pages and sum up the Herskovitses' key ideas as regards Afro-Brazilians:

In studying the economic aspects of life, the type of employment available to the 'Negroes', the wages paid for various kind of work, and the standards of living ... were analyzed. The economic position of women, an important point in any research into the survival of African custom, was examined carefully. One of the most characteristic, most picturesque, and most immediately noticeable elements in the Bahian scene is the Bahiana, the woman who, at various points throughout the city sells cooked food, principally dishes of African provenience, or sweets or meat .... Cost and return to them were investigated, as were other less picturesque aspects of women's place in the economic sphere, such as are implied by the existence of a large servant class composed mainly of Negro women. The economics of the African religious cult groups proved to be a fertile field. We have in our notes, for example, the original of a list of actual expenditure made by a novice at the time of her initiation into the cult (Ibidem, pp. 2-8).

Herskovits adds that the cost can be high and that for this reason it is possible to pay through the institution to be initiated on credit, with stipulated weekly or monthly payments to the cult head; and even 'scholarship' initiation, "when a candidate with an important god has no resources.... Cooperative effort has been found to be an important economic mechanism in all the Negro societies we have hitherto studied. However this in Bahia is less self-evident than elsewhere, except among fishermen". Herskovits pays a lot of attention to the *amásia*, which he calls the institution of free mating that furnishes the mechanism which permits African patterns of plural marriage to survive in a culture where all sanctions, secular as well as religious, are mobilized to support the European monogamist tradition:

We found it is not uncommon for men to have one or two mates in this category, plus a married wife...the acceptance of half-brothers and -sisters by each other is an indication of the vitality of the aboriginal type of social structure to which the survival of certain aspects of the ancestral cult gives a real validity (Ibidem, p. 6).

Even though the *amásia* is described as an example of Africanism, Herskovits argued that the purest African elements in Afro-Brazilian life lay in the field of religion. The cult-groups functioned as centres which kept the African tradition alive. The Herskovitses chose to concentrate on the study of how the cults were integrated into other aspects of the culture,

An outstanding characteristic of African life, which has been everywhere retained in the New World, is its patterned discipline, so as in the inner organization of the Afro-Brazilian religious groups... The etiquette of the cult as an expression of discipline exacted and given, the careful assignment of duties of the various members and the meticulous care given to carrying out these duties, the order prevailing at ceremonies, whether among participants and spectators, all showed cult-life and cult-procedure to be social phenomena exhibiting a degree of orderliness far removed from the common concept of African ritual as spontaneous and naïve. (Ibidem, p. 8)

That is, it is exactly this internal discipline that confers a special status and distinction on the cult: they are beautiful because of the internal logic and their orderliness. The report also comments on the kind of recordings, which are

song-cycles heard during the sacrifices of larger and smaller animals, and songs in the death rituals; songs employed during initiatory rites and the song-cycles for the 'offering of the head' of a devotee. Most of these songs were checked in the only really valid way to control them – by hearing them sung during actual ceremonies, sometimes by the very singers who recorded them for us (Ibidem).

It is worth remembering that the recording was done in the premises of the Museu da Bahia, an elegant location in possibly the nicest upper-class avenue of Salvador. The ethnographic account ends with a commentary on cultural syncretism – the integration of African and European custom:

As in other Catholic New World countries, each African deity is identified



with a saint of the Church. In Brazil, however, no cycle of African cult-worship is complete, nor any initiation valid, without pilgrimage being made to certain churches named for saints that are equated with important African deities. (Ibidem)

The last comment concerns black magic, which was said to be on the rise together with the greater role played by those who exploited beliefs that were not permitted free play, especially in those parts of Brazil where the suppression of African survivals had been harder and where institutions prestige lacking had to go underground:

The disparity between the actual survival of Africanisms in these regions and the hypotheses concerning the extent of survival possible under repression, held not only by those not in sympathy with a policy of tolerance, but also by some students who profess the read atrophy into signs of outer disappearance, is of methodological significance in orienting approaches in the wider field of the study of cultural survival. (Ibidem)

That is, the more society suppressed African survival, the more it created opportunities for black magic and people exploiting other's beliefs. It is a point of view that was present and would soon resound in Roger Bastide's perspective on the corrupted Afro-Brazilian religious experience, and in his not-so-subtle preference for "Yoruba" rather than "Bantu" expressions in Brazil (Bastide 1974: 101-106). The preference for the Yoruba had a lasting effect and was already present in Brazil as early as in the gaze of Nina Rodrigues and later Edison Carneiro on African heritage in Brazil as well as in Herskovits' PhD supervisor George Seligman. [33] Stefania Capone, in her overview of Afro-Brazilian studies in the years 1930-1970, shows in masterly fashion how the construction of a pure Yoruba-Nago-centred version of the candomblé religion – which does not practise any offensive magic – resulted from the interplay between religious leaders and Brazilian and foreign sociologists and anthropologists (Capone 1999:203-300; see also Góis Dantas 1984).

Most of the report, from pages 14 through 37, is devoted to its second aim. This part contains, indeed, a few sweeping yet interesting statements: "... A large proportion of Brazilian men of letters and figures in the academic world have derived from the plantation area of Brazil. The heritage of the slave economy, furthermore, is seen in the present-day socio-economic orientation of Brazil – the fact that there is, relatively speaking, no middle class, and that Brazil not being as yet industrialized lacks wealth to support full-time, professional scholars" (p. 15). The difficulty of making a living in the practice of the social sciences, which forced many scholars to earn a living as doctors, historians or journalists, deterred young people from enrolling in the newly opened courses.

Herskovits believed in the cross-fertilization between teachers and students, and in creative adaptation to the Brazilian context of ideas and theories coming from abroad. This, however, was not what happened:

The academic scene in Rio and S. Paulo is, indeed, so international that the fact that one is in a Brazilian setting is sometimes lost sight of. This

might be highly advantageous if it led to development in these centers of the true internationalism of scholarship. One receives the impression, however, that it results rather in the formation of a mosaic of nationalism (p. 25).

Four types of social scientists can be identified in Brazil, argues Herskovits. The first and most important stems from the academic setting, such as the faculties of philosophy and law. In the second group come those who work under the auspices of the national and local institutes of history and geography. These institutes often have important archives, but

Insofar as intellectual leadership is concerned ... these institutes offer little promise. Each appears to be controlled by a small group, whose membership regards the institute as their private concern, and would scarcely welcome the intrusion of a young scholar with live intellectual interests, who might bring up discussions that would disturb their afternoon hour of relaxation with coffee and pleasant conversation (p. 26).

For those familiar with contemporary Brazil, the situation in these local institutes, alas, remained largely unchanged! The third category comprises those in government-controlled organizations, outside museums and faculties, who are charged with research and investigation in the social sciences. The fourth group includes those without academic or institutional affiliation often carrying out careful investigation – they account for a considerable proportion of the publications in the social science field. Engineer and sociologist Euclides da Cunha, author of the classic *Os Sertões*, and Nina Rodrigues are considered part of this fourth group. In the following section, Herskovits lists and ranks the five main centres for the teaching of the social sciences. The major ones are in Rio and São Paulo, of course. In Rio, the Faculty of Philosophy is the most interesting place, especially thanks to the work of Anísio Teixeira, “who stimulated a real flowering in the social sciences”, and Arthur Ramos (p. 28); the National Museum, led by Heloísa Alberto Torres, was attempting to set up a programme for field research in anthropology, “Because this program leads to no formal degree, however, difficulty is experienced in attracting students, and those who have taken the training have had to be subsidized during their schooling” (p. 29). The Escola de Sociologia e Política in São Paulo was a promising example of good teamwork under the leadership of Ciro Berlinck, and was by far Herskovits’ preferred centre. However,

This school exhibits a tendency to copy, somewhat uncritically at times, American orientations and methods... It labors under a serious financial handicap, inasmuch as it does not have government support. The Faculty of Philosophy and that of Law also offer work in the social sciences. Historical work and sociology, in the French tradition, is given by three excellent French professors at the Faculty of Philosophy, “Here is one of the strongest centers of the tradition of importing foreign teachers, and I understand that requests have been made to the Nelson Rockefeller Committee for aid in bringing to the institution men from the US in the humanities and statistics to replace Italian professors whom the war compelled to resign their posts (p. 30).

The third and fourth centres are located in Salvador and Recife. In Bahia,

The newly formed Faculty of Philosophy is interesting from several points of view. Its director, the Secretary of Education and Health of the State of Bahia, Dr. Isaías Alves, is a professional educator, having been himself a teacher, having studied at Teachers' College, New York, and having served in the national Ministry of Education. It is... the only institution of higher learning in Brazil which is relying on a private endowment to finance its work... Whether the men who make this Faculdade will be able to free themselves of the deep-seated intellectual tradition of the region, which stresses a broad, generalized type of investigation and fine writing for its own sake as against modern social science approaches, will, in large measure, depend upon the publications available to them, and on what other stimuli as to method and aims they receive. At the moment, however, there is a degree of enthusiasm, drive and earnestness in the undertaking that I found impressive as I watched the project develop over a period of months. (Ibidem)

The situation was altogether different in Recife, where the Faculty of Law, "the only possible institutional center for social science investigation, lives on its past reputation". However, the presence in the city of two personalities such as Gilberto Freyre and Ulysses Pernambucano meant that Recife must be included among the significant centres of present activity and future potentiality in social science. The fifth locality mentioned in the report is Porto Alegre, which, despite the fact that there is almost no work in the social sciences, has one of the oldest university traditions in Brazil. The Faculties of Law and Philosophy of the state university could be promising in this respect (pp. 30-32).

The last part of the report is devoted to the budget [34] and the acknowledgments. He acknowledges Dr Lewis Hanke of the Library of Congress for the luncheon to introduce them to several key intellectuals in the (selective) Jockey Club in Rio upon their arrival in the city, the staff of the American Embassy, the Brazilian headquarters of the Rockefeller Foundation and the Division of Intellectual Cooperation of the Brazilian Foreign Office (especially its chief, Temistocles Graça Aranha). Herskovits also acknowledges the special articles that appeared in the press about his work under the signature of Afrânio Peixoto, Cecília Meireles, Gilberto Freyre and others. In Bahia he thanked the *Interventor* Isaías Alves, and. José Valladares" (p. 36).

The second report, of April 6, 1943, addressed to Conselho de Fiscalização, is considerably shorter (10 pages versus 37). After a page and half of thanking the Brazilian authorities, this second report adds an important piece of information that was not mentioned in the first. For a number of (unspecified) reasons, it was not feasible to take motion pictures. The film brought to Brazil was donated to the Museu Nacional to use in its research programmes. The recording project resulted in 166 twelve-inch records, on which a total of 650 songs were captured. These are mainly songs of the Afro-Bahian cult-groups, many of them with words in African dialects. The original records are in the Folk-Song Archive of the National Library. The reports states that a copy of this will soon sent to the Conselho. It is not clear whether

this did actually take place. After that the report only contains the ethnographic section of the first report. The whole section on the Brazilian intellectual life contained in the first report is left out. It can be assumed that this second section was too confidential to be included for a report accessible to Brazilian officials and intellectuals.

The report, apparently, had quite an impact on the council. The *Diário Oficial* (September 21, 1943, section 1) spoke of it quite highly: “The Council listened attentively to the reading of the report submitted by Professor Melville Herskovitz [sic] and his wife... and considered the scientific interest of the work of the scientist and the contribution which they [Melville and Frances] brought to Brazilian ethnology, especially in the field of negro acculturation, and expressed to Professor Herskovits and to his distinguished co-worker, Mrs. Herskovitz [sic], its great appreciation and esteem, congratulating them heartily on the success of their research which will make possible studies of greatest importance to the field of modern africanology” (translated by the US Embassy in Rio). There is no mention of the research and final reports sent to the council by Frazier and Turner in the *Diário Oficial*.



Image 4

Jean Herskovits (1935-2019) in her apartment with the Xango's ax belonging to her father and mother.

Source: photo by Livio Sansone.

## In Closing

The reasons for the lasting success of the Herskovitses' fieldtrip in Brazil, in spite of the fact that they never published the book on Brazil as they had planned, are manifold. First, their fieldwork method was painstaking, detailed and focused, and benefited from the experience, reputation, images and recordings they had built up elsewhere in the Americas and Africa; second, the notion of African survivals or Africanism was in those days politically convenient and fitted smoothly with the priorities of the local modernist elites; third, their presence and interest was convenient to the candomblé community – while Frances and Melville needed access to the cult houses, the cult houses used the Herskovitses as leverage for local political support. One can say that Frances and Melville, rather than Frazier and Turner, were the

right people, with the right ideas, at the right time and place. My final point is that the Herskovitses' entanglement with social scientists and intellectuals in Brazil was one of the key motives for their conclusion on the survival of Africanisms in Bahia, since it spoke to the priorities of the modernist component of the local intellectual and political elites as well as to the agenda related to the birth of anthropology as a discipline in Brazil.

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[1] Jewish Austrian writer Zweig was extremely popular in Brazil. His classic celebration of Brazil, published just before he committed suicide with his wife Lotte in Petropolis included a chapter on his visit to Bahia in 1941, in which Zweig expands on the Bonfim popular feast (Zweig 1941).

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[2] This debate is also revealing of a period characterized by the increasing separation of anthropology and sociology in the US, especially at the University of Chicago, and on the mission of the two disciplines (Patterson 2001: 71-102). Both Frazier and Turner had a PhD from the University of Chicago. On Herskovits as gatekeeper see also the documentary "Herskovits at the Heart of Blackness", produced by historian Vincent Brown, with Llewellyn Smith and Christine Herbes, in 2009.

[3] For this research I worked through the following documents at the Rockefeller Archive: Rockefeller Foundation Records, RFR, Projects SG 1.1, Series 100, International, series 257 Virgin Islands FA386. Series 216 Illinois Social Sciences, Subsection 216-S, Box 20: Document 214.9. Northwestern University, Melville Herskovits J., Travel, Anthropology, 1941.

[4] Moseley to Herskovits, April 10, 1941, RFR.

[5] Willits' notice to the TF, May 23, 1941, RFR.

[6] Cecilia Meireles introduced Herskovits to Mário De Andrade (29-9-1941 De Andrade's Papers, IEB/USP)

and so did Gilberto Freyre, who asked de Andrade to send more books to Herskovits, informing that Herskovits had already read his books on the black sculpturer Alejadinho and the *congada* magic drum session (10-1-1935, De Andrade's Papers, IEB/USP). On August 19, 1935 Herskovits replied, thanking him for the books and promising that he would send his Surinam recordings to Mario.

[7] With the Good Neighbor Policy (GNP) the American government, through the Office of the Coordinator of Inter-American Affairs (OCIAA), which as from August 1940 was coordinated by Nelson Rockefeller, was trying both to improve the relationship with Latin America and to counteract the neutrality of an important part of the Brazilian government and public opinion in the Second World War.

[8] MJH to Willits June 23, 1941, RFR.

[9] Valladares had been indicated as Herskovits' interpreter – later he also became a commentator – by Isaías Alves, brother of Governor Landulpho Alves, who combined the position of Secretary of Education with the directorship of the new Faculdade de Filosofia.

[10] Herskovits received other requests for funding from Brazilian institutions, which he forwarded to the Rockefeller, Guggenheim and Fulbright, usually to no avail. He was much more successful with grants for individuals, such as Arthur Ramos and Vianna Moog, and especially the PhD students in anthropology Octavio da Costa Eduardo and Mario Wagner in 1943 (both students at the Escola Livre de Sociologia in S. Paulo), Ruy Coelho in 1945 and René Ribeiro in 1944 (see, among others, the successful application to Willits of the Rockefeller for Eduardo, NU MJH RF 1943-44 Box 50 F. 17). See also the application to the RF for Valladares, with the support of William Barrien (Barrien to MJH April 3, 1943, Box 50 F 17). Eduardo was the path-breaker and Melville fondly called him the guinea pig: the first successful Brazilian applicant to whom fresh applicants can refer (MJH to Eduardo, September 20, 1945, Box 32 F 35). The correspondence between Eduardo and Herskovits has been painstakingly analyzed by Ferretti & Ramassotte (Repocs 2017), but that between Herskovits and Ribeiro, Coelho and Valladares still deserves close scrutiny. At first glance, such correspondence shows a similar pattern, dictated by friendliness, genuine interest from the side of Herskovits in carrying out research in Brazil and dependency from the side of Brazilians – in terms of facilities and opportunities it is very much a one-way system. The only thing these young Brazilian scholars had to offer was their motivation, certain inside knowledge and the country of origin – being Brazilian could be an asset during the Good Neighbor Policy. In the meantime, Melville was also (co)sponsoring or supportive of the research as well as, in some cases, obtaining a PhD in the US, and of other important intellectuals and researchers of the Afro-Latin world, like Aguirre Beltrán in Mexico, Price-Mars in Haiti, and Rómulo Lachatañeré in Cuba.

[11] Initially the couple had planned a trip to Maranhão before going to Bahia. Health problems – apparently Melville had his first stroke in Rio – prevented them from doing so and they spent more time in Rio they had originally planned. Herskovits would soon manage to satisfy his curiosity for black culture in Maranhão indirectly, by sending Octavio da Costa Eduardo there for field work for his PhD, the first Brazilian to get a PhD in anthropology, under Herskovits' supervision (Ferretti & Ramassotte 2017).

[12] Amidst the documents that Melville sent to Northwestern, there is a copy of the Bahian police list of permits granted for "African religious ceremonies" for the years 1939-40-41 (MJH to Northwestern, July 29, 1942).

[13] The couple would go to Port Alegre towards the end of their stay in Brazil.

[14] Herskovits reported on this public lecture to the magazine *Science Press* suggesting they write about it (MJH to Cattell, May 7, 1942).

[15] It was an honorific position, but in those days quite an important one. Evidence of this is that the second honorary professorship was offered to Gilberto Freyre in 1943 (de Azevedo 1984: 78).

[16] Despite this celebration of Herskovits, an international name in black studies, in those years the situation of Afro-Brazilian studies in Bahia was dismal. Arthur Ramos and in 1939 Couto Ferraz and Edison Carneiro moved to Rio de Janeiro, then the federal capital. Apart from the Columbia-State project of Bahia-UNESCO in 1950-52, which focused much more on race relations than on what was then understood as Afro-Brazilian studies, it was only in 1959, with the foundation of the Centre of Afro Oriental Studies (CEAO) through an initiative of the Portuguese refugee Agostinho da Silva, that the UFBA started to invest in the development of Afro-Brazilian and African studies in Bahia (Oliveira & Costa Lima 1972: 32-35). In 1965 CEOA launched its journal *Afro-Asia* which is still possibly the main journal in the field in Brazil—[www.afroasia.ufba.br](http://www.afroasia.ufba.br).

[17] Herskovits to J. Willits, May 26, 1942, RFR.

[18] Willits to Herskovits, May 14, 1942, RFR.

[19] Willits to Herskovits October 20, 1942, RFR.

[20] Herskovits to Willits, November 4, 1942, RFR.

[21] Brazilian newspapers devoted a lot of attention to the couple. For example, the newspaper *A Manhã* had seventeen reports on the couple's voyage to Brazil. Altogether the Herskovitses got a much better press coverage than Frazier and Turner. Frazier and Turner got attention because of their singularity since they were possibly the first two US black scholars to come to Brazil with prestigious grant and as part of the Good Neighbor Policy (GNP). The Herskovitses received attention because they came as part of the GNP and during the war and, of course, also because they were white. Three prestigious newspapers devoted attention to them. *Correio da Manhã* (September 17 and 21, 1941), *Diário de Notícias* (September 19, 1941: reporting of MJH reading his lecture in Portuguese) and *Jornal do Comércio* (18 and 20 September, 1941), which reported Melville Herskovits visiting the Academia Brasileira de Letras with its president Afrânio Peixoto and Roquette-Pinto, who showed him around, introducing him as the "US Nina Rodrigues". At the ABL Roquette Pinto suggested that with the help and knowledge of Herskovits, "who has already been in Africa", Arthur Ramos and other Brazilian scholars should organize an expedition to the part of Africa where the slaves come from – a lot of our anthropological questions would be solved by such an expedition" (*A Manhã*, October 9, 1941, p. 4). Between 1941 and 1950 the Rio newspaper *A Manhã* devoted 17 articles to the Herskovitses. It is remarkable that some of Brazil's top intellectuals wrote, always quite positively, about the visit of the couple to Brazil: Afrânio Peixoto, Camara Cascudo, Roquette Pinto, Manuel Diégues Junior and Gilberto Freyre. None of them ever commented on Frazier and Turner.

[22] Moreover, MJH managed to mobilize his connections for his protégés. So, Aguirre Beltrán helped

Valladares when he spent one month in Mexico City as part of his training in museum studies (Valladares to MJH, August 8, 1944).

[23] This dissertation is worth exploring. On February 29, 1948 she sent a copy of the list of contents, a brief description of each of the nine key informants, a summary of the introduction, the glossary and the list of the 59 collected tales.

[24] In the candomblé cult houses, the babalorixá is the manager of the house and he is responsible for the orixá cult.

[25] René Ribeiro in a letter to MJH writes of Bahia as “*a sua terra*”, your homeland. Melville was sentimentally attached to Bahia in a way (RR to MJH June 2, 1955).

[26] See what comes in 1944: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zSo7yIXTwbo>

[27] It is worth stressing that neither Herskovits nor Frazier and Turner seem to have contacted the two most outstanding black social scientists of the time, Edison Carneiro and Guerreiro Ramos. Neither in Frazier’s nor in Carneiro’s correspondence is there any mention of one another. Pierson, Landes and Ramos did not introduce Carneiro to Frazier. It would have been the obvious thing to do. Frazier and Carneiro were both left-leaning, Edison presently a communist and Frazier a radical, even labelled a “Stalinist” by several of his Howard fellows (Platt 2002). Carneiro had moved to Rio in 1939 and Frazier spent about two months in Rio before going to Bahia. Why they did not meet? Was it because of the tension created by the relationship between Landes and Carneiro? Here is one of the mysteries made public by my research. Another one is why Jorge Amado, always a curious observer of city life, seemed not to have paid much attention to Frazier and Turner’s stay in Salvador even though he was aware of their recordings that would have formed a part of the soundtrack of the movie *Mar Morto* – the first movie shot in Bahia, which was never completed (Estado da Bahia October 3, 1940).

[28] It is quite possible that the aftermath of the scandal, in the then very provincial Salvador, was the reason Gizella, a promising junior scholar, dropped from her junior position at the Faculdade and from anthropology altogether. It is worth recalling that Ben Zimmerman not only left Brazil right away, but abandoned his PhD project.

[29] A woman who is initiated in the cult of the orixás and takes a special position as such in the candomblé house.

[30] In spite that the Herskovitses only spent five days in Porto Alegre, they managed to gather enough material to produce what Melville called a “substantial article” (Herskovits 1943).

[31] It is obvious that for Herskovits the issue of sexuality and religious life is a tense question in the research in African survivals in the New World and needs to be explored better.

[32] In those days foreign scholars needed the approval of this council in order to carry our research in Brazil.

[33] In his *The Races of Africa* (1930, London: The Home Library), then a must-read in physical as well as social and cultural anthropology, a book that, in its French translation, was adopted as a manual by the first Brazilian folklore mission, Charles Seligman devoted a whole section to the Yoruba, called “The True Negro: The Quintessence of One of the Four Main African ‘Races’”.

[34] Herskovits states in his final budget overview that he only paid 5.5% of the total donation to informants.