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### Songs and intellectuals: the musical projects of Alain Locke, Alejo Carpentier, and Mário de Andrade

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September 2011

Songs and Intellectuals: The Musical Projects of Alain Locke, Alejo Carpentier, and

Mário de Andrade

Paul Gilroy's effort to grasp the cultural and political currents of the Black Atlantic finds one of its guiding threads in black music, its social relations, and its circulation in this vast area. The story of the Fisk Jubilee Singers and the complex reception of their performances of spirituals by diverse audiences on both sides of the Atlantic functions as a key example in his critical and nuanced examination of the politics of black authenticity. This discussion, in turn, directly contributes to Gilroy's case builds for a theoretical model of diaspora that understands ethnicity as "an infinite process of identity construction. (Gilroy 223)

It makes intuitive sense that a similar focus on music should allow us to extend Gilroy's approach to the Black Atlantic beyond the boundaries of the English speaking world, especially given the vitality, creativity, and global reach of African inflected musics all through the Americas. That is not as easy as it seems, of course. Still, Gilroy's treatment of the Jubilee Singers opens a fruitful perspective for exploring the opportunities and challenges of including two other major languages of the Americas, Spanish and Portuguese, in the conversations of the Atlantic diaspora. In particular, his

discussion of the work of Alain Locke (1885-1954), a leading figure of the Harlem Renaissance and the editor of the influential anthology *The New Negro* (1925), opens up a promising comparative perspective.

A professor of Philosophy at Howard University, Locke had received his PhD from Howard in 1918, and had been the first African American to receive a Rhodes scholarship. He wrote about African American culture and supported the work of African American intellectuals throughout his career. In 1925, Locke collected in the anthology *The New Negro* contemporary creative pieces by African American writers as well as essays on African American culture and its relation to Africa. For George Hutchinson, Locke's goal as an editor was to affirm the "ideal of a national Negro cultural awakening" through the orchestration of "numerous different voices and points of view" in this (Hutchinson 397).

Gilroy quotes from the opening paragraph from the essay on music that Locke contributed to *The New Negro*:

The spirituals are really the most characteristic product of the race genius as yet in America. But the very elements that make them uniquely expressive of the Negro make them at the same time deeply representative of the soil that produced them. Thus, as unique spiritual products of American life, they become nationally as well as racially characteristic. It may not be readily conceded now that the song of the Negro is America's folk song; but if the spirituals are what we think them to be, a classic folk expression, then this is their ultimate destiny. Already they give evidence of this classic quality [...] The universality of the spirituals looms more and

more as they stand the test of time. (as quoted in *Black Atlantic New Negro*, 199)

Locke's representation of the spirituals as folk music of national and universal significance finds a close analogy in the treatment of certain vernacular musics that are culturally identified as having African roots by two influential Latin American intellectuals, the Cuban Alejo Carpentier (1904-1980) and the Brazilian Mário de Andrade (1893-1945), particularly when we focus on their essays on music that date from the 1920s.

Alejo Carpentier and Mário de Andrade are recognized now as major literary figures of the 20<sup>th</sup> century and remembered, above all, for their achievement as fiction writers. In the 1920s, at the beginning of their careers, both writers were engaged in polemics for artistic renewal and played an important role as intellectual leaders.<sup>1</sup> (See Vicky Unruh's *Latin American Vanguard*s for a comparative discussion of Carpentier's and Andrade's vanguardist projects (125-169).) Mário de Andrade was one of the organizers of the 1922 Week of Modern Art in São Paulo, usually taken as the starting point of the Modernist movement in the country. Carpentier was at the center of the afrocubanist movement in Cuba. Like Locke, Carpentier and Andrade were both advocates for the music of African roots in Cuba and Brazil. In the 1920s, a defense of black vernacular musics was likely to find a dismissive, if not hostile response, as the paragraph by Locke quoted above suggests: "It may not be readily conceded now that the song of the Negro is America's folk song..." All three writers insisted, tirelessly,

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that these musics must be taken seriously at a time when prejudice weighed heavily on the reception.

This article explores a broad pattern of similarities in the ways that Locke, Carpentier, and Mário de Andrade approach African inflected vernacular musics. The three intellectuals converge in calling on composers of cultivated music to both recognize the richness of these traditions and draw on them to create work that will be comparable in spirit and quality to that of Stravinsky and other great names of twentieth-century European national music. Yet the striking similarity of their musical projects goes hand in hand with significant, albeit less evident contrasts between the personas that each intellectual constructs through the process of writing. Locke takes the position of a black intellectual leader in his discussion of the spirituals; Carpentier, for his part, writes as a white intellectual who admires the music of Afro-Cubans, but from the outside, whereas Mário de Andrade writes as a *mestiço* who is confident that he fully belongs in the *mestiço* culture of Brazil. The comparative discussion will bring to light a broad and unstable field of racial identifications and relations, in which “blackness” is variously defined. In order to do justice to the complexities of the Atlantic world broadly conceived, I suggest, we need to move beyond the clearcut, binary opposition between “black” and “white” that prevails in the English speaking area (and underlies Gilroy’s argument) in order to fashion a flexible, dynamic, and comprehensive understanding of “blackness.” (Frye? Sansone?)

If we consider now the conclusion of Locke’s essay the parallels between his work and that of the Latin American authors will become especially clear.. In the last few paragraphs Locke calls for “a broader conception and more serious appreciation of

the Negro folk song.” He argues that it is not enough simply to preserve the spirituals and envisions, rather, their “art development” into “the music of tomorrow” by a “genius” who will be the “giant of his age” (208-210). Throughout the article he mentions several composers who are already working in the direction he has in mind. These names suggest how far beyond “folklore” Locke hopes that such “modernist music” will develop: Edgar Varèse (1883-1965), a French and American composer of experimental music; William Grant Still (1895-1978), whom Eileen Southern has described as the Dean of Afro-American composers; Darius Milhaud (1892-1974) who established himself as a major composer in France in the 1920s (after spending a few years in Brazil); Antonín Dvůrak (1841-1904), a leading figure of Bohemian musical nationalism, and Igor Stravinsky (1882-1971), whose *Firebird* (1920) is a landmark of 20th century music. Locke brings together a group of composers who are well recognized as innovators of cultivated music, yet share, at the same time, an explicit interest in reworking vernacular traditions. They are all European, with the exception of William Grant Still. All of them drew from the vernacular musics of the Americas, albeit in varying degrees.

Locke’s list of names suggests that he turns to musical nationalism as the model for his project of having a composer of genius develop innovative music out of the material provided by the spirituals.<sup>2</sup> A widespread movement that had begun in Europe in the 19<sup>th</sup> century and coincided with political movements for national independence, musical nationalism remained a vital current of innovation at the time when Locke was

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<sup>2</sup> I want to acknowledge Beth Polzin, who first suggested to me that musical nationalism provided a useful context for the discussion of Locke’s and Carpentier’s essays.

writing. Locke pointedly refers to Dvorák, a composer who had lived and worked in the United States from 1892 to 1895 and whose well-known *New World Symphony* (or, *Symphony no 9 in E Minor: From the New World*) had premiered in New York City in 1893. Locke's article in *The New Negro* mentions thematic and melodic borrowings from spirituals in Dvorák's work, reiterating an opinion about the *New World Symphony* that was current at the time and encouraged by the composer himself (210).

The national styles of 20<sup>th</sup> century music are a central reference for Mário de Andrade and Alejo Carpentier as well.<sup>3</sup> The same European composers favored by Locke are revisited in the Latin Americans' texts: Varèse, Milhaud, Dvorák, and Stravinsky. Locke included African American composer William Grant Still in this largely European group; Carpentier and Mário de Andrade follow an analogous strategy, bringing up the names of composers from Cuba and Brazil on a par with the Europeans. However, there is little overlap between the names of composers from the Americas mentioned by the three writers. Carpentier and Mário de Andrade converge in their admiration for the Brazilian Heitor Villa-Lobos (1887-1959), but they don't seem familiar with William Grant Still. Carpentier adds to the group the names of the Cubans Amadeo Roldán (1900-1939) and Alejandro García Caturla (1906-1940), while Mário de Andrade calls attention to another Brazilian composer, Luciano Gallet (1893-1931).

This consistent preference for musical nationalism, together with the coincidences in Locke's, Andrade's, and Carpentier's choice of European models, reveal a great deal

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<sup>3</sup> Elizabeth Travassos undertakes an extended comparative discussion of Mário de Andrade's and Béla Bartók's conception of the "people" and its importance for their musical projects. Caroline Rae reconstructs Carpentier's musical preferences through an examination of his activities in Havana and Paris.

about their outlook. All three intellectuals develop their arguments from the perspective of cultivated, as opposed to vernacular musics. Locke was known among his contemporaries for his elitist musical tastes. When he began his studies at Harvard, Locke wrote to his mother about his interest in taking piano lessons, but added that he couldn't afford them (Harris and Molesworth 35). On the other hand, the Latin Americans' approach to music was formed through long training in the classical European tradition. Mário de Andrade trained as a pianist at the Conservatório Dramático e Musical of his native São Paulo from 1911 to 1917, and began a tenure as professor of History of Music and piano at the same institution in 1924. He was to maintain a lifelong interest in music, apparent in all facets of his work -- as creative writer, essayist, journalist, and educator<sup>4</sup> Carpentier, for his part, was also "a promising pianist in his youth" and, as Caroline Rae notes, even contemplated a career in music (377). Critics have often noted that Carpentier's engagement with music is enduring and permeates most of his work.<sup>5</sup>

In their essays and journalistic pieces of the 1920s, roughly contemporaneous with *The New Negro* anthology, the two Latin American intellectuals articulate analogous projects for the music of Brazil and Cuba, which aim for the the recognition, but also the development of vernacular musics. Their arguments run parallel to Locke's. Above all, they rely on a similar distinction between folkloric and artistic music.

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<sup>4</sup> Gilda de Mello e Souza's authoritative *O Tupi e o alaúde* analyses Andrade's experimental narrative *Macunaíma* from the point of view of the "creative process of popular music" (11). Jorge Coli discusses Andrade's views about 20<sup>th</sup> century music at a later stage of his career.

<sup>5</sup> Brennan notes that Carpentier's 1946 *Music in Cuba* "set the stage for everything in his career that followed" (4).

Andrade's *Ensaio sobre a música brasileira* (first published 1928) brings to the foreground with special clarity the assumptions implicit in this contrast between folklore and art:

O artista tem que só dar pros elementos já existentes [na inconsciência do povo] uma transposição erudita, que faça da música popular, música artística, isto é, imediatamente desinteressada. (16)

The artist only has to make an erudite transposition of elements that already exist [in the unconsciousness of the people], in order to make artistic music out of popular music, that is, in order to make immediately disinterested music. [reference as per format]

Andrade's stance is openly normative. His understanding of "art" relies directly on the categories of classical aesthetics. Not only does he embrace the demand that art be disinterested; he presents it as the criterion for distinguishing between artistic and popular music, or "folklore," as he puts it in other passages of the text. The familiar vocabulary of aesthetics permeates his argument. Elsewhere in the essay, we find a discussion of composers of "genius" who may write music that has "universal" appeal even as they write national music. The convergence between Andrade's argument and Locke's suggests that both develop within a shared framework of assumptions. Such a perspective on aesthetics and art cannot help but carry implications for their understanding of "folklore." Andrade's popular music and Locke's spirituals are analogous not just in their unrecognized folkloric richness but, finally, in being not quite artistic.

Similar assumptions shape also Alejo Carpentier's approach to Cuban music. This convergence is especially evident in his enthusiastic review of Amadeo Roldán's

*Obertura sobre temas cubanos*, a central work of Cuban nationalist music. Caroline Rae briefly reconstructs the context of the composition and performance of this piece, in the course of her discussion of Carpentier's activity as a journalist and music critic in 1920s Havana. At the time, Carpentier was "a committed advocate of European modernism." His articles discussed "Debussy, Ravel, Falla, the Ballets Russes, Picasso, Leon Bakst, Cocteau, Satie, the composers of Les Six (individually and as a group), Bartok, and Stravinski, hailing *The Rite of Spring* as the ideal model for Cuban musical nationalism" (375). Rae stresses that Carpentier belonged to a Leftist group of intellectuals, the *Grupo Minorista*. Although Amadeo Roldán did not sign the *Minorista* manifesto, he knew those in the group well and developed a close friendship with Carpentier. Roldán shared with Alejandro García Caturla the goal of composing music inspired by both Afro-Cuban rhythms and the innovative classical music of their time.

Carpentier's review of Roldán's *Obertura* relies, again, on the distinction between folklore and art:

Roldán cree que la inspiración popular debe utilizarse haciendola sufrir un intenso trabajo de elaboración, purificándola, modificándola en ciertos aspectos, a fin de transformarla en una materia ligera, dúctil, apta a dejarse imponer los moldes de la forma, sin la cual no puede existir verdaderamente la obra. (41)

Roldán believes that in order to use popular inspiration, we should have it go through an intense work of elaboration, purifying it, and changing it in certain respects, in order to transform it into a light, flexible matter that

will be amenable to the imposition of the mold of form, without which there can be no work.

Capentier's representation of the composer is a familiar one: although he has one foot in the folk tradition, his horizon extends far beyond folklore. Roldán is defined as an artist precisely because his goal is to go beyond the realm of the vernacular. For Carpentier as well, the task of the composer is to alter folkloric music to the point that it can be used as "matter" in a formal composition. [Mareia]

This comparison with the two Latin American writers calls attention to an aspect of Locke's treatment of the spirituals that may not be immediately apparent. The model of musical nationalism, shared with Andrade and Carpentier, enables Locke to build an argument calling for a black vernacular music to be taken seriously – but not on its own terms. This approach carries consequences not simply for the way the critic understands the relation of folklore to art, or the role of the composer; it shapes also Locke's own position as an intellectual. Like the composer of artistic music, Locke does not belong, simply or fully, to the tradition of the spirituals. Rather, he sees beyond that world and looks for the horizon of universal culture. The orientation of the intellectual beyond and away from folklore is unmistakably clear in Andrade's and Carpentier's work; the comparative discussion helps bring it to light in Locke's texts as well.

In a roundabout way, this comparison has led to an insight into Locke's view of the spirituals that resemble points that have already been made by African American scholar of Black music, Samuel A. Floyd Jr. Editor of an anthology on the music of the Harlem Renaissance, Floyd contributes to the volume an article about Locke's essays. At the same time as he acknowledges that Locke's work "invites comparison" with "the

efforts of late nineteenth century western European Nationalist composers,” Floyd places his arguments in the context of a broader cultural project shared by several Harlem Renaissance intellectuals, who aimed for “the cultural transformation of black folk culture into a formal or higher culture – an art of greater value” (38 and 29). Even as Floyd is critical of the contradictions in Locke’s attempt at the “vindication” of black music, he calls attention to the political goals that underlie his overall project:

At bottom, the Renaissance was an effort to secure economic, social, and cultural equality with white citizens, and the arts were to be used as a means of achieving that goal. (2)

In the course of his contextual reconstruction, Floyd calls attention to class differences among Harlem Renaissance intellectuals. He describes those in terms of housing patterns:

For the affluent – doctors, lawyers, and successful businessmen – there was Sugar Hill, where also resided W. E. B. Dubois, Roy Wilkins, Walter White, Jules Bledsoe, and other Renaissance leaders who lived at 409 Edgecombe Avenue in one of the nation’s first high-rise apartment buildings. Just below Sugar Hill was Striver’s Row, where successful middle-class New Negro artists and writers such as Paul Robeson, Countee Cullen, Clarence Cameron White, W.C. Handy, and Fletcher Henderson lived in the classy Paul Dunbar Apartments which stood at 7<sup>th</sup> Avenue and 150<sup>th</sup> Street. James Weldon Johnson lived at 185 West 135<sup>th</sup> Street and Fats Waller lived next door. Then there was The Valley, which contained the black working classes and “sporting types”. (20)

Floyd's introduction of the category of class allows us to see in a new light the preference for musical nationalism that is evident not just in Locke's approach, but rather in that of the three intellectuals we have been considering. Locke's, Andrade's, and Carpentier's familiarity with European composers and their projects presupposes an elite education, even as their ambition to have musical nationalism emulated betrays the outlook of an elite. As Brazilian critic José Miguel Wisnick has noted, in a discussion of Mário de Andrade's essays on music, the "abyss" that divides the intellectual from the people may be apprehended as a "cultural" one, yet it may also be formulated, "in other terms, as class alterity" (145).

This broad comparative pattern brings to light yet another shared element - but one that distinguishes these projects from their European models. Locke, Carpentier, and Mario de Andrade rely on musical nationalism as a lens that enables their approach to African inflected vernacular musics. As we will see, in the process of writing about these musics, each intellectual needs to take a position within broader cultural fields that define what counts as "black" and what counts as "white." Their perspectives differ, as do the writing personas that each of them shapes for himself; this diversity, in turn, calls attention to significant variations in the ways that "blackness" is understood in the Americas. The effort to bring Spanish and Portuguese into the conversations of the black Atlantic requires, above all, that we explore the problems posed by such differences in construction.

Carpentier, like Locke, L, identifies folklore directly and exclusively with black vernacular music; however, he approaches it from a diametrically opposed point of view. Alejo Carpentier was white, as we know well. His parents were European; he grew up

speaking both Spanish and French, was educated at least in part in France, and spent a good part of his life in France too. Nevertheless, during the 1920s, first in Cuba and later in Paris, Carpentier was a central figure of the Afrocubanist movement. As we have seen, he supported the music of Amadeo Roldán and Alejandro García Caturla with enthusiastic reviews.<sup>6</sup> In addition, he has works in collaboration with the two composers: while he wrote the scenarios for Roldán's Afro-Cuban ballets *El milagro de Anaquillo* and *La rebambaramba*, García Caturla set to music some of Carpentier's *Poemas afrocubanos*. Robin D. Moore notes that in 1924 Carpentier became the editor in chief of the magazine *Carteles*, which "proved important to the overall valorization of Afrocuban music and dance in Cuba." (196) Finally, Carpentier's first novel, *Écue-yamba-ó* (1933) is a major prose work to have come out of this movement, even if in later years its author was reluctant to have it republished.<sup>7</sup>

Miguel Arnedo-Gómez takes the time to reconstruct the context of the Afrocubanist movement in the opening chapter of *Writing Rumba*, his study of the poetry of the period. This critic begins by noting that blacks in Cuba experienced "precarious social conditions" in the first three decades of the 20th century. In his view, the effort to "revalorize Afro-Cuban traditions" responds to a moment of economic depression and political agitation against Cuban republican regimes, but also of intense dissatisfaction with the controlling role the US played in the island. In this moment of heightened nationalist sentiment, Afrocubanism is distinguished by "the desire to promote an image

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<sup>6</sup> Moore discusses the mixed and often hostile reception of Roldán's music in Havana in the mid twenties (204).

<sup>7</sup> Jossiana Arroyo has explored the relations between the narrator of this novel, the fate of its black protagonist, and the constitution of the nation through writing.

of an ideal future Cuba without racial divisions.” (41) Carpentier’s work gives ample evidence of such a “desire for black and white unity.” At the same time, however, the unmistakable perspective of a white man informs Carpentier’s treatment of black musics.

His most well developed treatment of blacks’ contributions to the music of the island is to be found in a book of the 1940s, *Music in Cuba* (1946). Based on archival research, the author’s knowledge of contemporary music, and his sophisticated training as a musician, this narrative of the development of Cuban music since the 16<sup>th</sup> century reads almost like a novel. For Timothy Brennan, the editor of the English translation, this work corresponds to a turning point in the writer’s career and “set the stage” for the remarkable literary achievements that were to follow (4).

Although Carpentier discusses the role of black musicians throughout the narrative, the topic is most in evidence in the chapter “Blacks in Cuba,” which focuses on the free black professional musicians of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. He stresses their “enormous contribution to the artistic life of Cuba” (161). The author’s effort to bring their achievements to the attention of his audience is everywhere evident. Carpentier reconstructs the work black musicians performed, the professional restrictions they faced, and their difficult and insecure position in Cuban society. He presents the information he has been able to collect about their achievements. Blacks were the majority among professional musicians, yet they were barred from the most advantageous positions (154). The Havana Cathedral, Carpentier notes, did not accept “Ethiopians” in its chorus. Yet black musicians found employment in public dances, in the theater, and in bands and orchestras that performed on public and social occasions. Carpentier registers the names of the best maker of musical instruments in Cuba, Juan José Rebollos, of the virtuoso

Claudio José Domingo Brindis de Salas, who had a distinguished career in Europe yet died alone in Buenos Aires, of the singer María Gamboa, who was “applauded in Madrid, Paris, and London," and many others.

Nevertheless, and especially in passages that discuss the social division between free blacks and slaves, the outlook of an outsider, privileged and white, comes to the fore. Because of his 20<sup>th</sup> century musical tastes, Carpentier is interested mainly in vernacular, urban and contemporary Afro-Cuban musics. Arnedo-Gómez calls attention to a “kind of ethnographic methodology” that led him and other Afro-Cubanist intellectuals to make efforts to “come into direct contact with their raw material” by visiting black working class neighborhoods near Havana, attending religious ceremonies, and collecting and taking notes on the music and rhythms they heard (61). In *Music in Cuba*, Carpentier assumes that the music that he finds interesting now had been performed during colonial times only by slaves, and in “slave barracks,” rather than by professional musicians. In the few paragraphs that seek to imagine how a classically trained black musician might respond to vernacular Afro-Cuban music, Carpentier lapses into the language of exotic primitivism:

En esta primera mitad del siglo XIX, el negro hace *música blanca*, sin aportarle más enriquecimientos que los debidos a su atávico sentido del ritmo, que le lleva a acentuar de modo muy personal ciertos tipos de composiciones bailables. Cuando escribe una melodía, no parece recordar, por ahora, el acervo ancestral africano. El toque batá, el himno yoruba, las supervivencias totémicas observadas en comparsas del día de Reyes, la invocación “en lengua”, transmitidas por la tradición oral entre las

negradas esclavas, son cosas que tardaron mucho tiempo todavía en salir de un confinamiento impuesto por el sistema social de la Colonia. Cuando las comparsas se sueltan por las calles, el 6 de enero, con sus diablitos, reyes, y *culonas*, el “hombre político” se sesga, dejando pasar, como el blanco, aquel carnaval tolerado por las autoridades en virtud de una vieja costumbre. Si el tambor hace vibrar, por simpatía, las más secretas fibras de su corazón, no lo confiesa. (150) endnote: Alejo Carpentier, *La música en Cuba* (México: Fondo de Cultural Económica, 1946) 150)

[In the first half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, blacks played and created white music, without enriching it further, except with their atavic rhythmic sense, where they uniquely accentuated certain kinds of danceable compositions. When they wrote a melody, they did not seem to remember for the moment the rich treasure of their ancestral African heritage. The *batá* beat, the Yoruba hymn, the totemic survivals observed in the carnival parades (*comparsas*) held on Three Kings Day, the invocations in “native tongue” transmitted in the oral traditions of the black slaves, would take a long time to leave the confines imposed by the colonial social system. When the *comparsas* are let loose on the street on January 6, with their *diablitos* (little devils), kings and *culonas* (big-bottomed women), the “political man” draws back, letting pass, just like whites, that carnival tolerated by the authorities, respecting an old custom. If the drum made

the innermost fibers of his heart resonate in sympathy, he did not admit it.]

(163) (endnote: see Jossiana Arroyo's discussion of the *culonas* in...)

Carpentier comes close to reproaching professional black musicians for their music and the instruments they played. His second-guessing rests on a racialized understanding of music: cultivated music is “white,” even when played by a black virtuoso, while Afro-Cuban vernacular musics are “black.” Carpentier operates here with a clearcut opposition between “black” and “white.” This division, in turn, cannot help but affect the image of the author and his audience. Carpentier and those he addresses appear to share an understanding of cultivated music; in the terms laid out by this passage, both author and audience are constructed as white. Black Cubans don't seem to participate in the conversation, which is, nevertheless, about them.

The Brazilian Mário de Andrade, for his part, approaches the relationship between popular and Afro-Brazilian vernacular musics on different terms than either Locke or Carpentier. An overriding concern with national music serves as the viewpoint organizing the argument of his *Ensaio sobre a música brasileira* (1928). Andrade admires Brazil's *música popular* as “the most complete, most totally national, strongest creation of our race up to now” (24). He holds a broad conception of “popular music.” In his view, it encompasses not only rural musical folklore, as it might be collected by a scholar and as he himself collected it, but also urban musics, both the varieties performed in Afro-Brazilian communities and the numerous songs that at the time were being commercially recorded, such as the widely available and successful early *sambas* by Afro-Brazilian composer *Sinhô* (1888-1930). Andrade takes the people of Brazil – *a nossa raça*, “our race” – to result from a mixture of several different races. This representation, both

influential and persistent in Brazil, was shared by most in his generation. (Travassos 147; Sansone 287) Andrade's own experimental, but now canonical, narrative *Macunaíma* (1928), which dates from the same period, explores analogous images of the nation and its mestiço people with irony, and perhaps some pessimism as well.

The passage below illustrates the key importance of Andrade's view of the Brazilian people for his reflexion on music:

Cabe lembrar mais uma vez aqui do quê é feita a música brasileira. Embora chegada no povo a uma expressão original e autêntica, ela provém de fontes estranhas: a ameríndia em porcentagem pequena; a africana em porcentagem bem maior; a portuguesa em porcentagem vasta. Além disso a influência espanhola, sobretudo a hispanoamericana do Atlântico (Cuba e Montevideú, habanera e tango). A influência europeia também, não só e principalmente pelas danças (valsa polca mazurca shottsh) como na formação da modinha. (25)

It is pertinent to remember, yet again, what Brazilian music is made of. Although it has reached an original and authentic expression in our people, it comes from disparate sources: the Amerindian in a small percentage; the African in a much larger percentage; the Portuguese in vast percentage. Beyond that, there's the Spanish influence, especially the Spanish-American from the Atlantic (Cuba and Montevideo, *habanera* and *tango*). European influence too, not simply or mainly in dances (*watz*, *polka*, *mazurca*, *shotts*), but also in the formation of the Brazilian *modinha*.

Here, and elsewhere in the *Ensaio*, the notion of an “original and authentic” *música brasileira* serves the purpose of establishing that a Brazilian people has already been shaped, out of so many disparate sources.

Andrade diverges widely from Locke and Carpentier on this point: Rather than bring the focus to fall on the music of Afro-Brazilians, he takes popular music to be an achievement of the people of Brazil as a whole. This representation enables him to engage in a lively polemic against various types of “exclusivism”: the exoticism of European composers who arrive in search of “*sensações fortes, vatapá, jacaré, vitória-régia*” (“strong sensations, hot dishes, alligators, giant water-lilies,” 14); the “poverty” of rejecting all foreign influence, which can only lead to fatigue and banality, or yet an “unilateral” focus on “Amerindian” or “African” music, with the corresponding dismissal of “Portuguese” music. The openness of Andrade’s position seems reasonable and refreshing even now, more than 80 years after the *Ensaio* was published. From the point of view of our discussion, it is essential to note that Andrade regards Afro-Brazilian vernacular musics as one element only of the *mestiço* folklore that he is calling on artistic composers to rework. .

This insistent and distinctive Brazilian conception of a *mestiço* folklore and people carries consequences for Andrade's own self-presentation as an intellectual. Unlike Locke or Carpentier, Andrade speaks as a *mestiço*. In the case of this writer and as many in Brazil realize, the stance is more than a rhetorical or ideological construction. However, although the perspective of a *mestiço* underlies Andrade's treatment of popular music, in the text of the *Ensaio* this position takes shape only implicitly. We need to turn to Andrade's poetry to find more evident constructions of his writing persona as that of a *mestiço*.

It will be helpful to focus, first, on the poem *Improviso do Mal da América* (Improvisation on the Hurt of America), which, dated "February 1928," was composed in the same period as the *Ensaio* on Brazilian music. Andrade's trajectory during those years has been carefully reconstructed by Telê Porto Ancona Lopes. In 1927, he accompanied two wealthy female friends traveling by ship from São Paulo to the Amazon, stopping in every port along the coast. Andrade took every opportunity afforded by the trip to observe and collect information on popular culture. (This experience lies at the start of his lifelong interest in ethnography, ethnomusicology and anthropological research.) The second part of the *Ensaio sobre a música brasileira* publishes samples of vernacular musics from all over Brazil, collected by the author himself during this first ethnographical voyage, but also by several friends who knew of his interest.

Andrade's reflection on his reaction to this first trip through Brazil provides the material for "Improviso do mal da América." The lines below explore his conflicted response to the "stuff" of his land, or the "*coisas da minha terra*":

São ecos. Mesmo ecos com a mesma insistência filtrada

Que ritmos de sínco­pa e cheiros de mato meu.  
Me sinto branco, fatalisada­mente um ser de mundos que nunca vi.  
Campeio na vida a jacumã que mude a direção desta igaras fatigadas  
E faça tudo ir indo de rodada mansamente  
Ao mesmo rolar de rio das aspirações e das pesquisas...  
Não acho nada, quase nada, e meus ouvido vão escutar amorosos  
Outras vozes de outras falas de outras raças, mais formações, mais força.  
Me sinto branco na curiosidade imperiosa de ser.  
These are echoes. Same echoes, with the same filtered insistence/ as  
syncopated rhythms and the scent of these woods of mine./ I feel white, a  
being of worlds I never saw, inescapably./ I search this life for an oar that  
can change the direction of my tired canoes/ And will make everything  
start flowing quietly/ in the same rolling river of my aspirations and  
research.../ I find nothing, almost nothing, and my ears begins to follow  
lovingly/ Other voices other speeches of other races, deeper background,  
greater strenght./ I feel white in the imperious inquisitiveness of being.

Both the poet's aspiration to identify with popular culture and his alienation from it find eloquent expression here. In his search for the "*coisas da minha terra*" and for himself, he meets mainly with frustration. Yet, at the same moment when the poem realizes that he will find "nearly nothing," he also becomes aware of his love for the "other voices" of "other races". The poem racializes, then, the difference between Brazilian popular culture and the poet's own cultural preferences and background. The latter are figured as white, or as the poem puts it in the opening line, as the "imperious cry of whiteness within" (*o*

*grito imperioso da brancura em mim*). Above all, these lines represent the experience of the *mestiço* intellectual as the conflict between a popular culture that is longed for but remains unreachable and the seductive strength and overwhelming presence of white culture.

Mário de Andrade presents himself directly as a *bardo mestiço* (mestizo bard) in a poem written near the end of his life, and posthumously published, “Meditação sobre o Tietê” (Meditation on the Tietê River). (Domicio Proença Filho) This somber, tormented, and slow moving nocturne is organized around the image of the Tietê River, which crosses the city of São Paulo and flows westward, away from the coast and through the entire state of São Paulo. As he contemplates the river from a newly remodeled bridge, the Ponte das Bandeiras, the poet recollects his life in the modern city and the masses that inhabit it, forcefully expresses his disillusion with powerful politicians and the wealthy – the “owners of life,” as he puts it -- and reflects on love and on becoming a poet. The passage below is the one most relevant to our discussion:

E eu me sinto grimpado no arco da Ponte das Bandeiras,

Bardo mestiço, e o meu verso vence a corda

Da caninana sagrada, e afina com os ventos dos ares, e enrouquece

Úmido nas espumas das águas do meu rio,

E se espatifa nas dedilhações brutas do incorpóreo Amor.

Por que os donos da vida não me escutam?

And I am high on the arch of the bridge of the Bandeiras,

*Mestiço* bard, and my verse overcomes the ties

Binding the sacred *caninana* (serpent); it is in tune with the wind and

the air, and it gets roughened,  
Wet from the foam of the waters of my river,  
And gets shattered against the brutal fingerings of bodiless Love.  
Why do the owners of life not listen to me?

These lines mark a turning point. The poetic voice takes on an assertive tone, moving away from the “devastated” and “exhausted” mood that prevails in the beginning of the poem. Yet, soon after the poet affirms that he is a *mestiço*, his tone abruptly changes again, when he becomes aware that he is being ignored: “Why do the owners of life not listen to me?” The experience of social exclusion joins that of cultural conflict in Andrade’s account of being a *mestiço*.

The preceding examination of the essays on music by Alain Locke, Alejo Carpentier, and Mário de Andrade has called attention to a broad pattern of similarities in the representation of African-inflected vernacular musics in the Americas, at the same time as it has identified areas of divergence that need to be further explored. The three writers we discussed are now canonical literary figures, whose work has influenced generations of intellectuals. In the 1920s, they engaged resistant audiences with a polemical defense of the seriousness and complexity of vernacular musics. Their arguments share an analogous overall framework. All three take European musical nationalism as a model, but reinterpret the notion of “folklore” to enable the approach to black vernacular musics. A closer look into their arguments has called attention to significant nuances in constructions of “blackness.” When we consider Locke’s preference for musical nationalism in the context of Carpentier’s and Andrade’s arguments, it becomes apparent that all three writers share the outlook of an elite. The

comparison brings to the foreground, then, a class perspective that inflects Locke's advocacy of the spirituals. The comparison further calls attention to the instability of the category "blackness" in the Americas. In order to write about vernacular musics that are identified as black, or African inflected, each intellectual had to establish a relationship to his object by taking a position within a racialized cultural field. They took diverse positions. Locke wrote from the inside of the African American community, as one of its leaders. Carpentier wrote about the musics of Cuban blacks from the outside, as a white man implicitly addressing a white audience. Mário de Andrade's *mestiço* writing persona does not fit easily within the neat division between "black" and "white" that is familiar to those who live in the English speaking world. His position in the racialized cultural field is the least clear, and, for that reason, the most revealing for our purposes. Had he been born in the United States, Andrade would have been white; in Brazil, since he was a member of the educated elite, he was accepted as white. Yet there were limits to the acceptance he enjoyed. As Andrade's poetry shows, the *mestiço* intellectual is not only torn by cultural conflict, but vulnerable to discrimination. For all that, and despite his self-presentation as a *mestiço*, Mário de Andrade has been canonized as white. (I am borrowing a phrase coined by Eduardo Duarte to describe the reception enjoyed by Machado de Assis.) At a more general level, this discussion suggests that the effort to bring into the conversations of the Atlantic diaspora other languages, like Spanish and Portuguese, requires a flexible and nuanced understanding of "blackness," at once attentive to class differentiation and open to apprehending the complex experience of the *mestiços* in the racialized world of the Americas.

At a more general level, this discussion suggests that the effort to bring into the conversations of the Atlantic diaspora other languages, like Spanish and Portuguese, requires a flexible understanding of “blackness.” As we have seen, there is significant variation in the ways that it is conceived by writers in the United States, Cuba, and Brazil. An acute awareness of these complexities underlies Lívio Sansone’s detailed and thoughtful ethnography of contemporary black communities in Salvador, Brazil. Sansone’s concluding remarks are pertinent to our discussion as well. The anthropologist is critical of the practice of imposing on studies of race relations in Brazil the “polarized language” that is characteristic of constructions of blackness and whiteness in the United States, and the English speaking world more generally. Such an outlook, he stresses, often obscures the “subtle dynamics” of discrimination and resistance in Brazil (25). Sansone proposes that we need to move beyond both these polarized conceptions and the focus on a single linguistic area in order to undertake “international comparisons” effectively and construct “a more complete image of the black Atlantic” (296).

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