

# Artur Ramos' Falsetto<sup>1</sup>

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In one of his lesser-known books (*A aculturação Negra no Brasil*, 1942), Artur Ramos published an article, which as far as I know had never previously been published against Dr. Ruth Landes' research on the religion of the Blacks in Bahia from 1938 to 1939.

This article is quite distinct from Artur Ramos' writing in general. He condemns the American anthropologist's research without know anything about it declaring that she "generalized from isolated facts" and finding in her work "rancour against the Bahins and the Blacks". In truth, the entire article is based on suppositions—"knowledge of the first conclusions, some given verbally..."—effectively not directly from Ruth Landes but from third parties as we will see further on.

According to Artur Ramos, Ruth Landes field work method "is so unscientific that it will be impossible for me to say here what it consisted of." Since he is referring to a woman, a beautiful and attractive woman, the phrase carries with it a deliberately reticent and discourteous tone. He chose to leave the phrase as it is instead of narrating an episode to which he tangentially alludes—a very significant case of the irresponsibility of the Rio de Janeiro press during the first year of the New State [Estado Novo]. As she arrived in Rio de Janeiro coming from the United States, the reporter of an evening newspaper who was quite determined to wrench an interview from her questioned the American researcher. Since she refused to speak, the reporter had no doubts about consulting the maritime police who kept passports for a few days. He published a piece (5/5/1938) saying that she had come to study "the Indians in their huts", and attributing to her the declaration that

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1 Carneiro, E. (1964). Uma falseta de Artur Ramos. *Ladinos e Crioulos*. Rio de Janeiro, Civilização Brasileira.

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she would extend her studies from Bahia to the back lands of Mato Grosso, Goiás and Amazonas, in order to prepare a report on the living conditions of the Indians. “I hope to visit all the back lands and forests of Brazil...” She intended to contract “vigorous men” to carry her baggage. In point of fact Ruth Landes was at that time a member of the Department of Anthropology of Columbia University, New York, having published two books based on her research (*Ojibwa Sociology* and *Ojibwa Woman*) about an indigenous group from Lake Ontario—books which Herbert Baldus told me some years ago were of high quality; before coming to Brazil she had met Donald Pierson who had studied the Blacks of Bahia for many years; she brought letters of introduction from the most important North American anthropologists, in particular from Ruth Benedict. Artur Ramos confessed in his article: “She brought me various letters of recommendation from North American friends of mine...” He therefore had no right to assume the veracity of the newspaper report (to which the victim herself, furious, had drawn his attention) and even less right to declare that Ruth Landes had come to Brazil in search of “black tribes.”

With the exception of a short stay at Fisk University this was indeed Dr. Landes’ first contact with the problem of Blacks. But it is not true that her knowledge of the bibliography was “virtually zero”. It would be to ask too much to reject the work of anthropologists who had prepared for all eventualities of their proposed fieldwork with the argument that they had had no prior contact with the problem. Also it is not true that she intended to study “the sexual life of Blacks”. This captious affirmation simply repeats what appeared in the carioca newspaper article. I can guarantee that when Dr. Landes returned to the United States she knew as much as we Brazilian researchers about the religions of African origin in Bahia.

I was one of the friends in Bahia who Artur Ramos introduced her to by letter. For almost six months I accompanied her to almost all the *candomblés* of the city. I pointed out people with whom she should work – and with whom she did in fact work every afternoon of the working week; together we participated in public and private *candomblé* ceremonies, we participated in the popular life of the city, we discussed the progress of the research we checked the data and followed the leads that they provided. Never, absolutely never, has any scholar Brazilian or not has enjoyed such intimacy with the *candomblé* of Bahia.

Artur Ramos, who considered himself, and was considered by other to be the owner of the issue, could not have been pleased. She had not made use of all his letters of recommendation and during her stay in Bahia she had not remembered to write to him either to thank him for his letters or to ask his advice. On her return to Rio on the eve of her return to the United States she didn't feel like looking him up., There it is in his article: "When she left for Bahia I saw her no more. I learned from third parties that she did not present the letters I had given her to the administrative authorities of Bahia...I never saw her again. I had no more knowledge of her plans". I recall that later when I passed on a greeting from Ruth Landes, his reaction was significant: "Now?!"

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The opportunity that Artur Ramos was waiting for came in July 1940 when the *Journal of Abnormal and Social Psychology* published her article "A cult matriarchate and male homosexuality" in which Ruth Landes argued that cult leaders who had been overshadowed by the social prestige enjoyed by the mothers in sainthood sought to approximate to the ideal type of the mothers which led to certain feminine attitudes and in the last analysis homosexuality.

Knowing that his contact with the Bahian *candomblé* was superficial, Artur Ramos telephoned Aydano do Couto Ferraz, who in his own way ended up agreeing with Ramos telling him that "not all" the fathers in sainthood were homosexuals. Without knowing what the debate was about, and not having read the article, he couldn't have given a different reply. Artur Ramos asked me nothing nor said to me anything although I was by then living in Rio de Janeiro.

Criticizing the thesis, Artur Ramos denied that cult leadership was the "prerogative" of women affirming that it had always been of the men. The word "prerogative" is not present in Landes' article. And in the ten years that have passed since Artur Ramos left Bahia for Rio de Janeiro, there are as many women as men and they have overtaken the men in terms of prestige and importance as *candomblé* leaders. It is enough to cite the great women of Iyá Kalá, se Sussu, de Alaxêçu, de Maria Julia, de Pulquéria, of the last century [19th.], of Silvana, of Maria do Calabetão, de Flaviana, de Aninha, de Tia Massi, Maria Neném, de Dionísia, de Emiliana, of this century [20th.]. And

what should be said about the succession in the female line of the leadership of traditional candomblés such as Gantois and Engenho Velho? For whatever reason, the presence of men as leaders in the candomblé in 1938-39 was motive for unhappiness among the older African sects. Nor did the large number of effeminate men go unnoticed – in general cavalos of Yansã or Yêmanjá – who were present in the candomblés, either as subordinates or as leaders.

I do not find the statement that the homosexuality of the father was “ritual” anywhere in Ruth Landes’ article. Instead of this, the author tries to show that fathers react psychologically to the repugnance against male cult leaders by reacting psychologically adapting to the ideal” type of mother, respected, full of prestige, great lady, veritable matriarch. In the great majority of cases this psychological reaction leads to homosexuality.

I am explaining, not endorsing the thought of Ruth Landes. Her article was an interpretation which only psychologists may say whether it is correct or not. But the facts on which she based her argument were at the time real enough. Artur Ramos, who throughout his entire life made use of psychology (and of its branch then in vogue, psychoanalysis) could reject Landes’ argument but he did not have the right to do so purposefully twisting the thought of the author and insinuating vulgarities between the lines.

Ramos’ article was rejected by the São Paulo journal *Sociologia*, which had just come out. But a little later an American scientific institution to whom Ruth Landes had submitted a manuscript for publication consulted Artur Ramos on the merit of the text. I have no way of knowing how he responded to the consultation, but it is not difficult to imagine since Ruth Landes had to use her field notes “in a more popular vein” when writing the book *The City of Women* (MacMillan, New York, 1947).

When *A Aculturação do Negro no Brasil* was published in 1942, I wrote reviews for the magazine *Diretrizes*. I got as far as writing a note lamenting Ramos’ article. But before publishing it I spoke to him on the telephone. Here is his reply: “Don’t do it. If you do I will publish something even worse. ..” He wasn’t prepared to listen to reason or accept criticism. I wrote about the book without referring to the article. Why should I irritate a friend? And anyway it was extremely unlikely that Ruth Landes would ever know of the existence of such indelicate and vengeful pages.

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Excuse me for publishing all this only now, twenty years later.

I was Artur Ramos' friend, I am Ruth Landes' friend. Sooner or later I was going to be asked to pronounce on the criticism of one and the merits of the other. If I finally anticipate such inevitable demands, it is for two principal reasons—first to correct an injustice which was due only to the pride and vanity of Artur Ramos; second, to avoid that a diatribe against a simple article, read with malice and the intention of finding where he might harm the personal and scientific reputation of the author might possibly withdraw from the Brazilian bibliography on Blacks the work of a researcher who spared no pains to understand them in their religious manifestations in Bahia.