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EXILE AND ETHNOGRAPHY: JACQUES ROUMAIN AND THE PROBLEM OF
PLACE IN FRENCH AND HAITIAN NATIONAL THOUGHT: 1927-1944

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A Thesis Under the Direction of Clifford Rosenberg

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INTRODUCTION

In November 1939, Haitian writer, activist, and ethnologist Jacques Roumain addressed an audience gathered in his honor at the Harlem YMCA, in New York City: “facts can not remain localized and isolated any longer in time and space. They are immediately internationalized by the very substance of a war for a new re-division of the world. They have made as one the destiny of all mankind, no matter to what country or race they may belong.”¹ In his second of nearly six years of political exile, travelling and studying ethnography throughout Europe, the Caribbean, and the U.S., Roumain was well situated to discuss the internationalization of ideas once deemed local and isolated; a cosmopolitan intellectual, Roumain was immersed in international politics and foreign cultural movements. Born on 4 June 1907 to an aristocratic and politically connected family, Roumain attended Haiti’s top schools before completing his university studies in Europe, a common course for many young Haitian elites. In Switzerland, Roumain “pursued with passion the readings of Schopenhauer, Nietzsche, Darwin and the verse of Heine and Lenau,” before departing for Spain in 1926 to study agronomy in preparation for his return to Haiti where he would tend his family’s vast land holdings.² When Roumain returned

¹ Jacques Roumain, “Discours de Jacques Roumain,” in *Jacques Roumain: Oeuvres Complètes*, ed. Léon-François Hoffmann (Madrid: ALLCA XX, Collection Archivos, 2003).

² Jacques Roumain, “Lettres de Grünau,” in *Jacques Roumain: Oeuvres Complètes*, ed. Léon-François Hoffmann (Madrid: ALLCA XX, Collection Archivos, 2003), 803.

to Haiti in 1927, however, he was quickly swept up in the cultural nationalist resistance to the Occupation (1915-34), known as the “*mouvement indigéniste*.” Under the guidance of the preeminent twentieth century Haitian writer, diplomat, and ethnographer Jean Price-Mars, the indigenist writers articulated a new vision of Haitian identity rooted in the nation’s cultural particularities. Roumain’s posthumous “peasant novel,” *Gouverneurs de la Rosée*, remains one of the most highly regarded novels in Caribbean history.

Literary scholars and Caribbeanists have presented Roumain alternately as a youthful cultural nationalist and, later in life, as a Marxist internationalist.³ Strictly speaking, neither is accurate. Roumain was never entirely of the indigenist movement, yet his deeply rooted attachment to Haiti, to its local traditions and experiences, run throughout his work, through his years in the Haitian Communist Party, to the end of his life. An avowed Marxist in his mature years, Roumain adopted a materialist and internationalist approach to cultural questions, dedicating himself to the universal potential of cultural particulars. Roumain was emblematic of what James Clifford has called an “ethnographic modernist,” who “...searches for the universal in the local, the whole in the part.”⁴ Throughout his resistance to the U.S. Occupation, six years of peripatetic exile, and his final years in Mexico, Roumain challenged the parochial cultural particularism of his indigenist peers, the socialist-humanism and universalism of his French colleagues, and the ability of either to tell the totalizing cultural narrative both demanded.

In 1990, Michel-Rolph Trouillot called on scholars to begin addressing “...specific questions, tuned to Haitian particulars but informed by the international debates,” to counteract a

³ For an overview see J. Michael Dash, *Literature and Ideology in Haiti, 1915-1961*, (New Jersey: Barnes & Noble Books, 1981); David Nicholls, *From Dessalines to Duvalier: Race, Colour, and National Independence in Haiti*, (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1996); Léon-François Hoffmann, *Littérature d’Haïti*, (Vanves: EDICEF, 1995); and Valerie Kaussen, *Migrant Revolutions: Haitian Literature, Globalization, and U.S. Imperialism*, (Lanham: Lexington Books, 2008).

⁴ James Clifford, *The Predicament of Culture: Twentieth-Century Ethnography, Literature, and Art*, (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1988), 4.

“fiction of Haitian exceptionalism” that had permeated the literature on Haiti.⁵ Building on Trouillot, J. Michael Dash has argued that to transcend this predicament will require a deeper reevaluation of the “...ways in which exceptionalism has promoted a kind of narrow territorial orthodoxy in Haitian writing.”⁶ While both agree that the current predicament is rooted in the indigenist movement, Dash has recognized a revealing ethnographic tension within Roumain’s posthumous masterpiece *Gouverneurs de la Rosée*, in which Haitian peasants are figured both as atavistic others attached to pre-modern African cultural forms, as well as revolutionary transnational migrants. This thesis extends and adds historical depth to Dash’s work by looking closely at Roumain’s correspondence and archival materials from the *Musée de l’homme* in Paris. In particular, I will explore the tensions between the parochial and the universal throughout Roumain’s life, showing how his experience of exile and engagement with French ethnographic thought changed his understanding of Haiti as he participated in transatlantic debates over the significance of race, culture, and nation in the early twentieth-century.

Historiography

The historiography of post-revolution Haiti, sparse as it regrettably is, offers an interesting glimpse into the contrasting ways in which scholars approach a subject that has historically been defined almost exclusively in terms of social and political crises. Haiti, which achieved independence from France in 1804 through a protracted revolution, is increasingly considered an early test case for the modern developments of the Caribbean as a whole. This

⁵ Michel-Rolph Trouillot, “The Odd and the Ordinary: Haiti, the Caribbean and the World” *Cimarron* 2, no. 3 (Winter 1990): 11.

⁶ J. Michael Dash, “Fictions of Displacement: Locating Modern Haitian Narratives” *Small Axe* 27, (October 2008), 34.

was not always the case. In fact, until the late twentieth century Haiti was thought of as having little to offer Caribbeanists and Latin Americanists in terms of unraveling the complex formation of the region. Consequently, Haiti came to symbolize a historical anomaly and regional aberration. Suffice to say, this isolating narrative has only served to discursively alienate Haiti from the Western historical imagination. Nevertheless, post-revolutionary scholars have recently attempted to understand the extraordinary circumstances embedded in Haiti's past. Major themes of interest include the roll of race and color in Haitian politics, the tenuous relationship between nation and state, social and political radicalism, as well as global and regional influences on the island's development. Before proceeding, it is necessary to examine some of these recent trends to place the current essay in its proper historiographical context.

In *From Dessalines to Duvalier*, the Welsh historian David Nicholls is at pains, "...to show how race and colour have been intimately connected to questions of social class, international relations, economic structures, religious and other cultural movements, also to regional and personal loyalties."⁷ Nicholls argues persuasively that race, on the one hand, historically functioned as a unifying construct for Haitians, while color, on the other, functioned primarily as a politically schismatic antagonism. That is, racial pride typically unites Haitians across economic and social class lines when the island is either under attack from outside forces, such as in the early nineteenth century when France still posed an imminent military threat, or in the twentieth century, when a similar threat was posed by the United States. Barring such threats, variations in skin color operate within Haiti's internal political and social structure as a coded indicator of economic and social class distinctions, provincial versus urban upbringing, and cultural belief systems.

⁷ David Nicholls, *From Dessalines to Duvalier: Race, Colour, and National Independence in Haiti*, (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1996), 14

From Dessalines to Duvalier is primarily, “a history of ideas; its underlying hypothesis is that the ideas and beliefs of Haitians, which must be seen largely as products of their history...”⁸ This statement contains two crucial elements of post-revolution Haitian historiography: the first is the idea that, in order to understand the Haitian struggle for stability, it is necessary to reach back to the revolution and independence and the second is the primacy allotted to ideas and their ideological underpinnings as propellants for social and political conflict. Though these aspects predominate in the post-revolution period, the revolution itself has been traditionally explained by historians, most famous among them C.L.R. James, as a historical episode motivated primarily by the unfolding of contradictions in the material existence of the islands inhabitants. As he famously stated in his preface, echoing Karl Marx, “great men make history, but only such history as it is possible for them to make. Their freedom of achievement is limited by the necessities of their environment.”⁹

As Marxist interpretations have receded, materialist dialectic analysis has been remodeled into what at times resembles a cultural, ideological, and ideational dialectic more closely associated with the Hegelian tradition. That being said, it would be a mistake to completely divorce modern ideological and ideational interpretations from material concerns. Such a transformation is evident when Nicholls, describing the ideological construction of a mulatto-centric version of Haitian history by historian, Beaubrun Ardouin, states that the, “term ‘class’ might properly be used to describe blacks and mulattoes, but it is clear...that Ardouin meant by class simply a descriptive category, and not a significant social division.”ⁱ In this way, class divisions, which for James were concrete realities as well as the basis upon which an ideological superstructure would correspond, are, in Nicholls less doctrinaire attitude, mutually

⁸ Nicholls, xxxvi

⁹ C.L.R. James, *The Black Jacobins: Toussaint L’Ouverture and the San Domingo Revolution*, (New York: Vintage Books, 1963), x

constitutive with ideas and ideologies; color creates class and vice versa.

It was Nicholls' uncovering of the black middleclass's initial formation and expansion under the U.S. Marine Corps occupation of the island from 1915-1934 that set another precedent in understanding the roots of Duvalierism in Haiti. Nicholls, while pointing out the unifying effect of the occupation, which resulted in a receding focus on color and class difference among Haitians as a reaction to the blanketed and virulent racism visited upon all Haitians no matter color or class by the Americans, skillfully uncovered the importance of the Black middleclass and its link to the racial biological determinism of *noirisme* ideology. *Noirisme*, Nicholls explains, reconstituted the obsession with color divisions on the island by asserting that only dark skinned Haitians were authentic representatives of the nation. When President Lescot was overthrown in 1946 (commonly referred to amongst Haitian historians as the 'Revolution of 1946'), the replacement of his administration by members of the *noirisme* movement constituted the first step towards black rule and the eventual plunge into 'Papa Doc Duvalier's' despotic reign from 1957-1971, followed by his son 'Baby Doc Duvalier, from 1971-1986. It is important here to again emphasize Nicholls understanding of class in Haiti as a social division as much constituted and defined by ideology as by economic or social divisions, a distinction that will be addressed again as the essay proceeds.

In, *Haiti and the Great Powers: 1902-1915*, Brenda Gayle Plummer, professor of African American history as well as the history of foreign relations at the University of Wisconsin-Madison, seeks to explain the events that precipitated the invasion and occupation of the U.S. Marines in 1915. Plummer's celebrated anticipatory articles, "Race, Nationality, and Trade in the Caribbean: The Syrians in Haiti, 1903-1934," (1981) and "The Metropolitan Connection: Foreign and Semiforeign Elites in Haiti, 1900-1915," are indicative of the turn in 1980's

Caribbean historiography toward questions concerning international relations, diplomatic relations, and the unique functioning of 'Third World' governments in relation to modern Western powers. This shifting focus constitutes a predictable reaction to the anxieties associated with the Cold War, swelling economic liberalization, debt crises in developing countries and IMF bailouts. This desire amongst scholars to situate Haiti in a wider regional and global context was also evidenced in Nicholls own contribution, *Haiti in Caribbean Context*, 1985.

By focusing her study between the years of 1900-1914, Plummer complicates what has traditionally been treated as an inconsequential period in Haitian history. (This approach will again prove profitable in Matthew J. Smith's, *Red and Black in Haiti*, which takes as its focus the transitional years of 1934-1956 designating the end of the U.S. occupation and beginning of Papa Doc's reign.) Determined to remove herself from what she views as a Western-centric historiography that has, "so readily clothed itself with...cultural and ideological assumptions that it primarily served...the great powers.," Plummer maintains "...a focus that treats the behavior of states as originating in the matrices of the civil societies from which the states were created-centers where the roots of domestic and foreign policy are inextricably entwined."¹⁰ In so doing, Plummer uncovers subtle social and political processes and developments that will provide indispensable insights for later historians. Among her most valued contributions include her analysis of cosmopolitanism amongst the Haitian elite, the influence of foreign nationals within the Haitian elite, and the exceptional importance of merchants, especially maritime merchants, in a country that is economically dependent on European and American capital.

In her excavation of Haiti's relationship to Germany, France, Britain, and the United States, Plummer posits an early twentieth century Haitian State skillfully manipulating the 'great

¹⁰ Brenda Gayle Plummer, *Haiti and the Great Powers, 1902-1915*, (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1988), 6

powers' in order to maintain stability, fend off foreign intervention, and improve the island's economic and political structure. Plummer demonstrates how, while this skillful maneuvering had long proved an effective tool of the Haitian State, by 1915, with an escalating U.S. presence in the Caribbean and Latin America, the island's internal social contradictions and institutional vulnerability were exposed as the U.S. swiftly invaded and took control of the island for nineteen years.

Plummer's versatile methodology, which draws variously on components of Marxist theory, world systems analysis, literary theory, and dependency theory, furnished the necessary elbowroom to effectively analyze societal influences on Haitian foreign policy while integrating that analysis into a broader regional and international perspective. Just as important, Plummer's analysis, though not the first in this respect, elucidates the image of Haiti as a point of investigative departure in analyzing the development and political consequences of 'Third World' dependency, as well as the contradictions at the heart of modern Caribbean national projects.

As she points out in the epilogue, Haiti's regionally premature and multivalent nationalist developments are due in large part to the fact that, "the Haitian experience of the early 1900's, with its armed conflict and barbed literature, antedated the experience of other Caribbean peoples."¹¹ Thus, by accounting for Haiti's nationalist developments both internally and regionally, a fuller appreciation for those subtle yet important nuances of the interconnectedness of Caribbean nationalism appears more attainable.

It is to the relationship between the Haitian nation and state that University of Chicago anthropologist-cum-historian, Michelle Rolph Trouillot, turns his attention in, *Haiti: State*

¹¹ Plummer, 13

Against Nation. Trouillot, like Nicholls before him, is chiefly concerned in this work with unmasking the roots of Duvalierism, which he considers a distinct form of Haitian dictatorship; namely, he sees a fundamental transformation in the island's political history from authoritarian rule to totalitarian rule under Papa Doc and his son, Baby Doc. Trouillot postulates that although Haiti's history has been distinguished by authoritarian government, the uniqueness of Duvalier's tyrannical rule "emerged as the result of a long-term process that was marked by an increasing disjuncture between political and civil society."¹²

Steadfastly adhering to the now pronounced historiographical practice of seeking answers to Haiti's modern difficulties in the precedents established before, during, and immediately following the Revolution, Trouillot locates the disjunction between political and civil society as having originated in the process of liberation and independence itself. Accounting for this position, Trouillot claims that Haiti, under colonial rule, "embodied internal contradictions that were ultimately irreconcilable: between slavery and freedom, dependence and independence, export commodities and food stuffs, plantations and garden plots."¹³ For Trouillot, these contradictions, though initiated during colonialism, remain prescient obstacles to Haitian social and political stability and formidable vehicles for postcolonial internecine conflict on the island.

Setting out to analyze the evolution and character of Haitian civil society and state, Trouillot paradoxically utilizes a Gramscian theoretical framework to explicate his ideas concerning civil and political society. The paradox becomes apparent when one tries to reconcile Trouillot's vehement and repeated protestations that the Haitian state and civil society are distinct from Western traditions and conceptual analyses, while the relying on an uber-Western theoretical model to decipher Haiti's unique institutional structures. Such questionable

¹² Michelle Rolph Trouillot, *Haiti, State Against Nation: The Origins and Legacy of Duvalierism*, (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1990), 23, 26

¹³ Trouillot, 40

breaks between Trouillot's narrative and the methods used to achieve it abound, as he depends primarily, though not exclusively, on Western theoretical models to understand the crisis in Haiti.

That being said, Trouillot's analysis, despite questionable incongruities between theory and practice, proves quite effective at shedding new light on issues that Nicholls dodged and Plummer only flirted with. Chief among these issues is the specific effect of global capital formation for the island. For instance, relying on Harry Goulbourne's analysis from, *Politics and State in the Third World, 1979*, and Clive Y. Thomas's, *The Rise of the Authoritarian State in Peripheral Societies, 1984*, Trouillot points out that, "the peripheral capitalist state...never inherited a blank slate because the preceding colonial entity, as well as the conditions of its demise, limited both the new rulers' possibilities and those of their successors."¹⁴ As such, the outcome was, for those societies created on the periphery of the capitalist world, a condition of constant, "outward looking, if only because they are economically dependent on capitalist centers. Yet states are inherently inward-looking..." and consequently, "peripheral societies are characterized by a permanent tension between the centripetal forces of the state and the centrifugal forces inherent in dependency."¹⁵ In this way, Trouillot's attention to detail along with his rather wide theoretical range strengthen his assertions regarding Haiti's distinctive character and concomitant regional and international interconnectedness through capital formation. That being the case, Trouillot does occasionally run into trouble with defining the terms he employs.

Trouillot's thesis that Duvalier's reign represented a shift from authoritarianism to totalitarianism proves most inadequate compared to the rest of the work. Nicholls himself, in a

¹⁴ Trouillot, 23, 24

¹⁵ Trouillot, 66

review of the work, was quick to point out that, “he ignores the most important characteristic of totalitarianism: a dynamic politics designed to impose a total way of life on the nation and a consequent concern with every aspect of the people’s existence.”¹⁶ This was simply not the case in Haiti, as Caribbean economist Mats Lundahl reminds readers when he points out that a level of “religious freedom was permitted and cultural expression was not unified...” furthermore, “the economy was not brought under tight government leadership.”¹⁷ Though Trouillot attempts to mollify his detractors in the books notes, his defense is left wanting by his neglect to address the cultural implications of totalitarianism. Despite his theoretical breadth and impressive conceptualization of Haitian society, Trouillot is burdened at times by what at times becomes a reductive emphasis on political and economic considerations and their relation to Haiti’s historical trajectory.

At the close of his book, Trouillot, appealing to fellow historians and intellectuals involved in Haitian scholarship, attempts a concise answer to the ongoing question of what is most important in studying Haiti: “Ultimately, there is only one Haitian question: that of the peasantry.”¹⁸ He supports this lofty claim by asserting that, “it is in the contradictions of the peasantry that the resources, stakes, and predicaments of the nation intertwine.”¹⁹ This otherwise compelling argument is hampered by Trouillot’s tendency toward rigidity and finality in his claims. No one would deny the great importance of the peasantry to Haiti, but to identify the peasants as the most important group under consideration seems ill-conceived considering the many shifts in modern Haitian history. For instance, following the first U.S. occupation, which effectively centralized the state, economy, and communications on the island, there was a

¹⁶ David Nicholls, “Review: Untitled,” *The Hispanic American Historical Review* 71 (1991): 650-652

¹⁷ Mats Lundahl, “Underdevelopment in Haiti: Some Recent Contributions,” *The Journal of Latin American Studies* 23, (1991): 411-429, 414

¹⁸ Trouillot, 229

¹⁹ Trouillot, 229

dramatic demographic shift from rural to urban areas; peasants were forced, out of economic necessity, to pack up and head for metropolitan centers such as *Port au Prince, Cap Hâien, or Jacmel*. This migration and reconstitution of the Haitian masses makes difficult a wholesale acceptance of Trouillot's claim. This lack of a balanced perspective contains a dangerous potential for misrepresentation, however, keeping this in mind allows his positive contributions to remain profitable.

In 2001, U.S. historian, Mary Renda, published her celebrated contribution to Haitian historiography, *Taking Haiti: Military Occupation & the Culture of U.S. Imperialism 1915-1940*. Interestingly, the work's chief objective is not to study Haiti or Haitian as such, but rather, it seeks to explain the ways in which Haiti, "was one of several important arenas in which the United States was remade through overseas imperial ventures in the first third of the twentieth century."²⁰ Renda splits her analysis into two distinct parts. The first part, which is titled "Occupation," deals primarily with the actions and reactions of Marines on the ground in Haiti. How did they come to understand their roles and justify their positions in relation to the Haitian masses and what role did U.S. cultural baggage play during the occupation? The second part, titled "Aftermath," is primarily concerned with the effects of the occupation on U.S. culture. By treating the work in this manner, Renda is not exploring a history, but rather, she explores and interprets many intertwining and competing histories from both Haiti and the U.S. that have collectively shaped interactions between the two nations.

Renda argues that it is necessary to investigate the paternalistic discourse being deployed by the U.S. government to justify the occupation as well as the personal paternalism that existed amongst the troops who actually occupied the island. It is her contention that, "the discourse of

²⁰ Mary Renda, *Taking Haiti: Military Occupation and the Culture of U.S. Imperialism, 1915-1940*, (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2001), 12

paternalism called into play a whole variety of meanings and values surrounding race, gender, sexuality, and national identity, it opened up the possibility that those meanings and values could be reinvigorated...”²¹ With this approach, Renda examines diaries, governmental dispatches, the letters of soldiers, as well as the proliferation of U.S. magazine articles, fictional literature, and films that took Haiti as their focus.

Renda’s vision of paternalism is heavily influenced by Eugene Genovese’s distinguished interpretation of paternalist discourses that existed in the relations between slaves and masters in his masterly work, *Roll, Jordan, Roll*. Despite this influence, Renda departs significantly from Genovese. Whereas Genovese, as Renda points out, “figured paternalism as the ‘reigning ideal’ of an entire ‘social system,’ and thus as a relation between masters and slaves, which shaped both parties fundamentally...” while Renda’s own use of paternalism, “...interrogates paternalism as a discourse of domination that shaped those assigned to carry it out.”²² This is significant for several reasons involving scope and consequence. That is, since Renda fails to directly address the impact of this paternalist discourse on Haitians and the ways in which they responded, there is an unfortunate gap left in the dialectic she examines. How, for instance, can one hope to understand how U.S. soldiers reacted to paternalist discourse, thus reconceptualizing themselves and their nation, if the Haitian response is not explored. Surely these soldiers were not merely reacting to a voiceless nation with a static history against which they liberally chose what to accept and what to ignore. Without Haitian voices present and accounted for, the analysis, as compelling as it undoubtedly is, renders Haiti as a taciturn and agentless nation and political, little more than a backdrop on which actions materialize unhindered. In fairness, Renda does not claim to cover all sides and points out that more work needs to be done in this

²¹ Renda, 22

²² Renda, 312

area. Nevertheless, for an analysis that takes as its starting point the mutual affectivity of cultural interactions in shaping national and state identities, there remains a significant number of questions unaccounted for.

Renda's decidedly postmodern methodology, influenced greatly by Edward Said's analyses in, *Culture and Imperialism*, and, *Orientalism*, constitutes both a break with, but also an extension of both Nicholls and Plummer's initial engagements with the historical components that have shaped Haitian society. While Nicholls emphasized the deliberate and strategic construction of competing national histories by *milats* on the one side and blacks on the other in an attempt to justify rightful claim to nationhood, Renda emphasizes the important ways in which histories are conversely constructed through private and public channels. Governmental rationalizations for otherwise unappealing policies (such as war or internal repression), embedded and supported as they habitually are by carefully selected historical narratives, offer a window into how states enlist not only soldiers, but also civilian supporters. At the same time, and this is where Renda surpasses Nicholls, it is in the lived interactions and cultural signifiers that give those interactions meaning, that one can decipher the more commonly undetectable maneuvering that shifts a nation from the ground up. Here one might usefully recall Plummer's similar argument concerning the advantage of treating the, "...behavior of states as originating in the matrices of the civil societies from which the states were created..." Thus, the dialectical relationship between nation and state is continued, yet refashioned to accommodate what Renda views as the dominance of cultural forces in reshaping not only national beliefs and ambitions of state but also individual's perceptions of themselves and their position in relation to the international community.

In, *Red and Black in Haiti: Radicalism, Conflict, and Political Change, 1934-1957*,

historian Matthew J. Smith of the University of the West Indies, endeavors to complicate a conventionally disregarded period in Haitian history. Beginning with the U.S. departure from Haiti (at least in terms of an occupational military force on the ground) and concluding with the election of Papa Doc Duvalier, Smith seeks, like Nicholls and Trouillot before him, to explain the rise of Duvalierism in Haiti. This moment in Haitian history, as previously mentioned, has been largely ignored, and justified by the conviction that, though chaos prevailed, there was little rational basis for the chaos. Responding to this absence, Smith contends that, “the post occupation predicament, in which radicals with contrasting views of black power, radical nationalism, and Marxism fought for political space...” revealing, “a situation not unlike the postcolonial struggles elsewhere in the world later in the twentieth century.”²³ Briefly outlining the nationalist response to the U.S. occupation, which espoused an idea of Haiti as a nation that was one and indivisible, eschewing the usually divisive issues associate with color. With color cast aside, race and an ethnologically based pride in Haiti’s African origins stimulated the island’s politics and created a countermovement that eventually led to the occupation’s early conclusion. It is the political developments that followed the departure of U.S. occupation forces, for Smith, which can shed light on contemporary Haitian political culture.

Smith groups his analysis sequentially, each chapter devoted to a different president’s term, in order to systematize what he sees as a historical progression, fragmentation, and restructuring of political ideas and ideologies on the island. In so doing, Smith competently demonstrates the various ways in which, “various radical movements issued a powerful challenge to the country’s political tradition and transformed its political culture...” while calling attention to the unavoidable historical factor of how, “contingency frequently overshadowed

²³ Matthew J. Smith, *Red and Black in Haiti: Radicalism, Conflict, and Political Change, 1934-1957*, (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2009), 2

ideological commitment in the formation of political allegiances.”²⁴ Further strengthening his analysis, Smith focuses on the imperious effects of the Cold War on U.S. policy decisions toward the Caribbean and Latin America as the region came to be seen as an inescapable ideological arena requisite to the enduring dominance of Western ideals and global capitalism.

In demonstrating the enduring presence of U.S. ideological imperialism, Smith is able to not only exhibit the ways in which Haitian radical political movements were under constant pressure from their own repressive political culture, but how the regional interconnectedness of the U.S. and Caribbean contributed to a scene in which, “black activists saw themselves as part of a global battle against legacies of imperialism and colonialism...” and how black activists from the U.S., “looked to Haiti during their own struggles for civil rights and placed Haiti firmly within the orbit of African Diaspora politics.”²⁵ Thus, by broadening his geographic scope, and concentrating his analysis on the slippery terrain of radical ideological and political commitments, Smith furnishes a thorough examination of how outnumbered groups fused their efforts and subsequently affected a peculiar historical path significantly impacting the texture of present day regional political culture.

The contribution of these works to modern Haitian historiography is manifest. The still rather limited breadth of the historiography has resulted in an interesting *mélange* of historical interpretations that unavoidably overlap, remain frequently contradictory, yet just as often mutually substantiating. The origins of Haiti’s social and political crises have increasingly been treated with competent and penetrating analyses. This undeniably perplexing field retains its peculiar character but, with the historical and theoretical perspectives put forward here, it has achieved an opening that should serve to encourage a deeper proliferation of historical analysis.

²⁴ Smith, 69

²⁵ Smith, 82

Occupation and the Importance of Culture

U.S. Marines invaded Haiti on 28 July 1915, invoking a responsibility to quell political instability in the region, and assumed control of the country. Occupation forces rewrote the constitution, established the *Gendarmerie d'Haiti* for the internal surveillance and control of citizens, seized control of Haitian finances, and assumed unlimited veto power in political affairs. In the Occupation's first five years, Marines and Haitian gendarmes faced and mercilessly repressed an armed nationalist resistance by peasant guerillas known as *cacos*.²⁶ In early November 1919, in a surprise attack, Marines' killed *caco* leader Charlemagne Peralte, fastened his body onto a door with his arms hanging down on either side, and took a photograph.²⁷ This photograph, initially disseminated amongst the population to dishearten nationalist resistance, had the opposite effect. Peasants saw in Peralte's image a symbolic Christ crucified by the invaders, a martyr of American imperialism. At the same time, Haitian elites mounted new forms of cultural and intellectual resistance and in the process systematically reevaluated Haiti and its position in the world.²⁸

In response to the Occupation, many Haitian intellectuals initially extolled the superiority of their French cultural heritage over that of their Anglo-Saxon invaders; however, some found

²⁶ For a comprehensive account of these uprisings see Hans Schmidt, *The United States Occupation of Haiti, 1915-1934*, (New Jersey: Rutgers University Press, 1995); Mary Renda, *Taking Haiti: Military Occupation and the Culture of U.S. Imperialism, 1915-1940*, (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2001); David Nicholls, *From Dessalines to Duvalier: Race, Colour, and National Independence in Haiti*, (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1996).

²⁷ See Roger Gaillard, *Charlemagne Peralte le caco*, (Port-au-Prince: R. Gaillard, 1982); Georges Michel, *Charlemagne Peralte and the First American Occupation of Haiti*, (Iowa: Kendall-Hunt, 1996).

²⁸ See Léon-François Hoffmann, *Essays on Haitian Literature*, (D.C.: Three Continents Press, 1984); J. Michael Dash, *Culture and Customs of Haiti*, (Westport, C.T.: Greenwood Press, 2001); Valerie Kaussen, *Migrant Revolutions: Haitian Literature, Globalization, and U.S. Imperialism*, (Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2008)

in Haiti's African patrimony a far more effective defense.²⁹ Throughout the 1920s, Jean Price-Mars regularly excoriated Haitian elites for their political indolence, lack of leadership, and inner quarreling. Price-Mars accused Haitian elites of falling victims to “bovarysme collectif,” a condition of collective psychosis in which Haitian elites saw themselves as culturally French, to the neglect of their “authentic” Afro-Haitian identity.³⁰ Drawing on the sociological and anthropological work of Maurice Delafosse, Émile Durkheim, and Lucien Lévy-Bruhl, Price-Mars championed the study of Haitian peasant culture, the vodou religion, and popular folklore, which he saw as reservoirs of authentic Haitian national identity.³¹ Price-Mars called on the country's writers to begin drawing on the “...immense reservoir of our folklore, where for centuries the motives of our will have been condensed, where the elements of our sensitivity have been built, and where the fibers of our identity and national soul have been woven.”³² Under his guidance, a younger generation of Haitian writers, most of who had recently returned from studying in Europe, took up the charge.

In 1927, five of these young writers—Jacques Roumain, Carl Brouard, Antonio Vieux, Normil Sylvain, and Philippe Thoby-Marcellin—published *La revue indigène*, articulating a new vision of their country's place in the world that overturned popular assumptions of Haitian national identity. These writers sought to uncover and disseminate an authentic “national

²⁹ At the turn of the nineteenth-century, there had been vigorous debate among Haitian elites over whether an Anglo-Saxon “individualist” customs should replace their traditional Latin inheritance. Proponents of the Anglo-Saxon model argued that the implementation of a technocratic educational system would modernize Haiti. A summary of these debates can be found in: Léon-François Hoffmann, *Essays on Haitian Literature*, (Washington D.C.: Three Continents Press, 1984): 73-74; David Nicholls, *From Dessalines to Duvalier: Race, Colour, and National Independence in Haiti*, (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1996): 137-139.

³⁰ Jean Price-Mars, *Ainsi parla l'oncle* (New York: Parapsychology Foundation Inc., 1954), 10.

³¹ Gerarde Magloire-Danton, “Antenor Firmin and Jean Price-Mars: Revolution, Memory, Humanism,” *Small Axe* 2, (2005): 150-170.

³² *Ibid*, 194.

culture” that could “unite the past with the present and prepare for the future.”³³ Although the journal lasted a mere six issues, from July 1927 through February 1928, it articulated a specific cultural nationalist ideology characteristic of this transitional period in Haitian history. Above all, the indigenist writers struggled with Haiti’s dual cultural inheritance—African and European—which, they claimed, had distorted their country’s identity. In the third issue, Roumain argued that Haitian literature was “off its axis” because “first and foremost we are a negro people.”³⁴ Still, “nothing is more natural than Haiti’s customary reliance on French forms,” although they were “no longer masters of our sensitivity.”³⁵ Although the indigenist writers shared a common purpose, they diverged in strategy; no two writers were more emblematic of this divergence than Jacques Roumain and Carl Brouard.

As with World War I in Europe, the Occupation had thrown Haiti’s traditional social, cultural and political orders into disarray; Roumain and Brouard’s divergent approaches to culture illustrate the ideological tensions of this enigmatic period.³⁶ The most bohemian and mystical of the indigenist writers, Brouard reveled in what he deemed the untamed and anti-modern culture of the Haitian peasantry; for Brouard, the “savage” and “primitive” offered an antidote to the anemic bourgeois rationalism characteristic of Western modernity. Exceeding Price-Mars, Brouard celebrated vodou as “...our only creation, it is the certain pledge of an architecture, of a literature, of a national mystique.”³⁷ Drawing on French Monarchist Charles Maurras’ “integral nationalism,” Brouard broke with previous generations of Haitian thinkers

³³ Normil Sylvain “Chronique Programme,” *La revue indigène* 1, (1927), 5.

³⁴ Jacques Roumain, “Entre Nous: Jacques Roumain,” *La revue indigène* 3 (1927), 103.

³⁵ *Ibid*, 103.

³⁶ Daniel J. Sherman has offered an insightful addition to the literature on the cultural upheaval in interwar France in, Daniel J. Sherman, *The Construction of Memory in Interwar France*, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1999).

³⁷ Carl Brouard, “Le livre de Mr. Price-Mars,” *Le petit impartial* (13 October 1928).

who sought to write the country into international history.³⁸ Literary critic J. Michael Dash has suggested that “fascist politics are a hidden dimension to indigenist poetics,” and while this allure existed for other indigenist writers, Roumain was an exception.³⁹ Roumain acknowledged the need to abandon a reliance on French forms, though he never went as far as Brouard, claiming instead that “...in the twentieth century...one is a citizen of the world.”⁴⁰ The two writers thus represent the pole and antipode of the indigenist movement—one, parochial and particular, the other, cosmopolitan and universal.

Roumain’s universalist approach to culture during this period was most evident in his passion for collecting exotic cultural objects. In an interview with indigenist writer Antonio Vieux, Roumain boasted of his unorthodox literary tastes, pointing out “the great number of oriental books” in his library.⁴¹ Vieux marveled at the interior of Roumain’s office, a “hookah on a stool” evoked “an indescribable Oriental décor where naked women languish on carpets” amidst “walls lined with Persian drapery.”⁴² Revealing an antiquated Malaysian sword and Mongolian battle-axe, Roumain asked, “...looking at my weapons? All exotic.”⁴³ Roumain recalled fondly his time wandering through Parisian flea markets salvaging these exotic cultural objects, assuring Vieux he would have made a “marvelous collector,” attributing his passion for traveling and collecting cultural objects to his “ancestors, Bretons and sailors,” from whom he had inherited “this nostalgia for space.”⁴⁴ In the case of Roumain’s office, his mélange of

³⁸ For more on the fascist elements in *indigenism* see Dash, *The Other America: Caribbean Literature in a New World Context*, (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1998); David Nicholls, *From Dessalines to Duvalier: Race, Colour, and National Independence in Haiti*, (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1996).

³⁹ J. Michael Dash, *The Other America*, 75.

⁴⁰ Jacques Roumain, “Entre Nous: Jacques Roumain,” *La revue indigène* 3 (1927): 103.

⁴¹ *Ibid*, 103.

⁴² Jacques Roumain, “Entre Nous: Jacques Roumain,” *La revue indigène* 3 (1927): 104.

⁴³ Jacques Roumain, “Entre Nous: Jacques Roumain,” 105.

⁴⁴ *Ibid*, 105.

collected exotica told a more cosmopolitan and universal story about the collector, his culture, and his nation, than indigenist cultural politics could ever provide.

While the presidential election of the anti-Occupation politician Stenio Vincent in 1930 was viewed as a great success for the nationalists, it also signaled Roumain's imminent abandonment of that movement. By the early 1930s, Roumain distrusted the cultural nationalist movement he had helped pioneer, turning instead to communist internationalism. While scholars have attributed this in part to the influence of the Bolshevik Revolution, Roumain's embrace of communism had as much to do with nationalism as internationalism.⁴⁵ Carolyn Fowler, among others, has noted that at this time the nationalist impulse had given way to a rigid racial essentialism based on the country's African lineage.⁴⁶ In August 1931, Roumain published his first peasant novel, *The Bewitched Mountain*, about a peasant community faced with a series of tragedies they are powerless to overcome. The novel was met with mixed reviews. While Price-Mars had written a glowing forward to the book, a young François Duvalier, whose Griots group had spearheaded the Africanist takeover of the nationalist movement, complained that the book "has disappointed us immensely, immensely. It is not what Jacques Roumain had in store for us."⁴⁷ In 1929, Duvalier, along with the lawyer Lorimer Denis and journalist Louis Diaquoi, had begun discussing their plans to take indigenism in a radically new direction. Unlike the writers of *La Revue Indigène*, the Griots combined Price-Mars' work on folklore, Arthur de Gobineau's *Essays on the Inequality of the Human Races*, and ethnology, to claim the biological and

⁴⁵ A number of scholars have written about the influence of the Russian Revolution on the development of Marxism in Haiti. Two of the most important works to consider the matter: David Nicholls, *From Dessalines to Duvalier: Race, Colour, and National Independence in Haiti*, (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1996); Matthew J. Smith, *Red and Black in Haiti: Radicalism, Conflict, and Political Change, 1934-1957*, (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2009).

⁴⁶ Carolyn Fowler, *A Knot in the Thread: The Life and Work of Jacques Roumain*, (Washington, D.C.: Howard University Press, 1980), 213-216.

⁴⁷ Carolyn Fowler, *A Knot in the Thread*, 304.

psychological distinctiveness of Haiti and Haitians.⁴⁸ For Roumain, the Griots group posed an immediate cultural, ideological, and political threat to Haiti. Their nihilistic worship of racial purity terrified the cosmopolitan Roumain. Alarmed by the Griots movement, which had abused the folkloric, poetic, and ethnographic bases of indigenism, Roumain found in communism a possible defense against this burgeoning extremism.

Roumain's turn to Marxism was an attempt to recontextualize culture in universal terms. In January 1933, shortly after returning from New York where he had established connections with the U.S. Communist Party, Roumain was arrested and sent to the national penitentiary, before being released several days later. Prior to his arrest, police had confiscated a letter from Roumain to the left-wing journalist Tristan Rémy, releasing it to the press for publication on 4 January 1933. In the letter, Roumain professed: "I am a communist," and as the "...son of large landowners, I renounce my bourgeois origins. I have spent much time with the peasants. I know their life, their mentality, their religion—that amazing mixture of Catholicism and voodoo."⁴⁹ It doubtless appears paradoxical that Roumain would evoke the vodou religion to justify his turn to communism; however, more than anything else, it was Roumain's admiration for "that amazing mixture" that informed the rest of his life's work.

In June 1934, along with Christian Beaulieu and Étienne Charlier, Roumain published *l'Analyse schématique*; this pamphlet, divided into three sections—Écroulement du Mythe Nationaliste, Préjugé de couleur de Classes, and Critique du Manifeste de Réaction Démocratique—was the foundational text of the Haitian Communist Party (PCH). Roumain subsumed Haitian color prejudice, nationalism, and political culture under the rubric of class struggle. Denouncing Haitian nationalism, Roumain wrote that, although it had been "born of the

⁴⁸ Matthew J. Smith, *Red and Black in Haiti*, 23-25.

⁴⁹ Jacques Roumain, "Lettre à Tristan Rémy," in *Jacques Roumain: Oeuvres Complètes*, ed. Léon-François Hoffmann (Madrid: ALLCA XX, Collection Archivos, 2003), 639.

reestablishment of *corvée*...the massacre of more than 3,000 Haitian peasants...the expropriation...of the peasants by large American companies,” the Haitian “bourgeois avant-garde of the proletariat” had appropriated it for its own ends.⁵⁰ Roumain, a principal member of the “bourgeois avant-garde” he now denounced, had found in Marxism a scientifically based international and universalist discourse that could be applied to Haiti. Shortly after the publication of *l'Analyse schématique*, Roumain was arrested again and sentenced to three years in prison, of which he would serve half, thanks in part to the work of Langston Hughes’ Committee to Free Jacques Roumain (CFJR).⁵¹ Three months later, aboard a European bound ship with his family, Roumain wrote to the CFJR, “on my release, I was placed under the strictest police surveillance...rendered powerless...I find myself forced...to exile myself momentarily from Haiti.”⁵² Roumain’s experience of exile, a direct result of his conversion to Marxism, gave him a new conceptual vocabulary for thinking about Haitian culture. Although he had frequently accompanied Price-Mars into the Haitian mountains to perform ethnographic field research among the peasantry, his commitment to ethnology was rooted more in the intellectual culture of Paris than Haiti. Still, his experiences in Haiti influenced his intellectual outlook until his death in 1944. Despite Roumain’s protestations to the contrary, his nationalist commitments were actually strengthened through his experience of exile and contact with international ethnographers.

⁵⁰ *Ibid*, 654.

⁵¹ Roumain and Hughes first met when Hughes, a perpetual traveller (Cuba, Soviet Union, Japan, Paris, China, among other destinations) travelled to Port-au-Prince in 1931. The two African diasporic writers bonded immediately. Roumain had frequently expressed his admiration for the writers of the Harlem Renaissance, and held Hughes in the highest regard, writing in *Haiti-Journal* on 8 August 1931, “Langston Hughes is the greatest black poet from America.” Jacques Roumain, “Présentation de Langston Hughes,” in *Oeuvres Complètes*, ed. Léon-François Hoffmann (Madrid: ALLCA XX, Collection Archivos, 2003), 635.

⁵² *Ibid*, 675.

During his exile, Roumain followed international intellectual networks that stretched from Haiti to Paris, Martinique, New York, and Cuba, before returning to Haiti in 1941. His time in Europe produced in Roumain what Edward Saïd has described as the exile's unique "double perspective" on the world, as the Haitian intellectual negotiated a series of conceptual oppositions: home and abroad, science and spirituality, nationalism and internationalism, universal and particular—striving for a "more universal idea."⁵³ In Paris, Roumain was reintroduced to ethnography, studying under French sociologist Marcel Mauss and ethnologist Paul Rivet at the *Musée de l'homme*. In ethnography, Roumain found a critical perspective that balanced the local and particular with the international and universal. The pursuit of ethnographic knowledge also provided Roumain material benefits by securing intellectual and political contacts throughout the hemisphere on whom he could rely during an otherwise miserable period of his life. As an exiled ethnographer, Roumain confronted the limits of modern narratives of race, culture, and nation.

Particular Universals and Universal Particulars

As a refugee in Paris at the dawn of the Second World War, Roumain was thrust into international political and cultural chaos; the anti-fascist Caribbean intellectual was both exhilarated and terrified by what he saw, particularly the parallels to Haiti.⁵⁴ Before traveling to Paris, Roumain spent nearly a year in Belgium frequenting museums, discussing pre-Columbian

⁵³ Edward Saïd, Moustafa Bayoumi, and Andrew Rubin, *The Edward Saïd Reader*, (New York: Vintage Books, 2000), 378.

⁵⁴ For an insightful analysis of cultural and political shifts in interwar Paris see Gary Wilder, *The French Imperial Nation-state: Negritude & Colonial Humanism between the Two World Wars*, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2005).

history with archaeologists, meeting with fellow communists, and, most significantly, renewing his interest in ethnography.⁵⁵ Shortly after the birth of his daughter Carine in Belgium, Roumain arranged for his family to return to Haiti due to the escalating threat of fascism in Europe. Speaking at the *Congrès des écrivains pour la défense de la culture* in Paris, accompanied by his close friends Langston Hughes and Nicolas Guillen, Roumain declared:

I belong to a small nation of black people who are partisans of liberty, and who have played an important role in the libetary struggles of America ... When Bolivar ... sought refuge in Haiti, he found there arms and munitions ... Cuba is beholden to us for having helped Maceo and Marti ... It is my pride also to belong to that same people of Negro slaves who were the first ... to seize arms for the overthrow of the domination of their masters. Perforce, I am a Communist, an anti-Fascist.⁵⁶

Linking Haiti's historical struggles to international developments, Roumain reclaimed the universalist tradition of his nineteenth-century Haitian forebears threatened by the more extreme elements of the indigenist movement. Roumain wasted no time returning to questions of culture and nationalism, finding in French ethnographic thought an invaluable weapon against fascism. The field of ethnography, necessarily concerned with the exotic and unfamiliar, achieved unprecedented importance in interwar Paris and no two figures were more influential than Paul Rivet and Marcel Mauss, whose instruction at the *Musée de l'homme* connected young intellectuals from around the world. Both Rivet and Mauss were dedicated socialist academics who saw ethnography as a universal science capable of defending Europe from fascism. Working together throughout the 1930s, Mauss and Rivet joined forces with Georges Hènri Riviere to create the *Musée de l'homme*, which was inaugurated during the *Exposition Internationale des Arts et Techniques dans la Vie Moderne* in 1937. There, they would instruct and influence a new

⁵⁵ Carolyn Fowler, *A Knot in the Thread*, 176.

⁵⁶ Jacques Roumain, "Intervention au Congrès des Écrivains," in *Jacques Roumain: Oeuvres Complètes*, ed. Léon-François Hoffmann (Madrid: ALLCA XX, Collection Archivos, 2003).

generation of leftist intellectuals such as Jacques Soustelle, Claude Lévi-Strauss, Henri Lehmann, Deborah Lifchitz, and, in 1938, Jacques Roumain. Students from France, its colonies, and throughout Europe and the Americas converged at the newly established *Musée de l'homme*, generating a series of transnational intellectual networks that carried French ethnographic thought throughout the world.⁵⁷

Ethnography provided a dynamic intellectual middle ground in which artists, intellectuals, and leftist radicals could unite and synthesize their various approaches to cultural questions. For example, it was *négritude* writer Léon Damas who advised Roumain to enroll at the *Musée de l'homme* in 1938.⁵⁸ Damas' connection to Rivet and Mauss is emblematic of ethnography's appeal to a variety of leftist intellectuals. Damas, along with his *négritude* collaborator, Aimé Césaire came to ethnology through surrealism, a common course for many avant-garde thinkers craving a more scientifically rigorous approach to cultural questions. Like Roumain, when Léopold Sédar Senghor traveled from Senegal to Paris in 1920, he was anxious to begin training in ethnology, especially after visiting the ethnological holdings at the Trocadéro Museum, where Pablo Picasso had found inspiration for his famous painting, *Demoiselles d'Avignon*.⁵⁹ Yet, drawing on the work of Lucien Lévy-Bruhl, Senghor found in ethnology a rationale that posited western societies as rational, as opposed to the fundamentally anti-rational state of non-western societies.⁶⁰ Coupling this with Arthur de Gobineau's *Essay on the Inequality of the Human Races*, Senghor conceptualized *négritude* as the discovery and preservation of an essential African essence that lay at the core of all African or African-descended peoples, unlike

⁵⁷ See Christine Laurière, *Paul Rivet, le savant et le politique*, (Paris: Publications Scientifiques du Muséum national d'Histoire naturelle, 2008); Alice Conklin, "Civil Society, Science, and Empire in Late Republican France: The Foundation of Paris's Museum of Man," *Osiris* 17 (2002), 255-290; Benoit de l'Estoile, *Le goût des autres: de l'exposition coloniale aux arts premiers*, (Paris: Flammarion, 2007).

⁵⁸ Christine Laurière, "Jacques Roumain, Ethnologue Haïtien," *L'Homme* 173 (2005), 191.

⁵⁹ Souleymane Bachir Diagne, "Senghor et la Revolution de 1889," *The Romantic Review*, 100 (2009).

⁶⁰ See Lucien Lévy-Bruhl, *La Mentalité primitive*, (Paris: Librairie Félix Alcan, 1922).

Aimé Césaire, who saw negritude as historically contingent, dynamic, and hybrid. Senghor's ethnographic engagement had led to precisely what Roumain feared in Haiti, a search for essence and authenticity.⁶¹

Unlike many of his Antillean and African comrades, Roumain regarded surrealism with contempt.⁶² As such, Roumain did not partake of that intellectual disposition that James Clifford has termed “ethnographic surrealism,” characterized by the “...corrosive analysis of a reality now identified as local and artificial,” while supplying “exotic alternatives.”⁶³ Roumain disdained surrealism primarily for what he saw as its undisciplined and politically escapist character, evident in his criticism of the Haitian surrealist poet Clément Magloire Saint-Aude, “...who refuses to change the world, flees from reality, denies it through bitter artifice of a reinvention of language.”⁶⁴ Roumain was just as disdainful of the more esoteric cultural relativism underlying ethnographic surrealism as he was of the racial politics of fascism. For Roumain, both sides were missing the real point—freedom, liberation, and equality—were only possible through the constant and repetitive mixing of cultural antinomies. It was ethnography's universally scientific approach to culture that appealed to Roumain. In this way, Roumain

⁶¹ For more on the connection between negritude and surrealism see Belinda Elizabeth Jack, *Negritude and Literary Criticism: The History and Theory of “Negro-African” Literature in French*, (Conn: Greenwood Press, 1996); J. Vaillant Black, *French, and African. A Life of Léopold Sédar Senghor*, (London: Harvard University Press, 1990); S.B. Diagne, *Léopold Sédar Senghor, l'art africain comme philosophie*, (Paris: Riveneuve Editions, 2007); René Depestre, *Bonjour et adieu à la Négritude*, (Paris: Seghers, 1980); Louise Tythacott, *Surrealism and the Exotic*, (London: Routledge, 2002); T. Denean Sharpley-Whiting, *Negritude Women*, (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2002); Philip A. Dennis and Wendell Aycock, eds., *Literature and Anthropology*, (Lubbock, TX: Texas Tech University Press, 1989).

⁶² Africans, Antilleans, and African-Americans were critical political and cultural actors in Paris during this period. See Philippe Dewitte, *Les Mouvements nègres en France, 1919-1939*, (Paris: L'Harmattan, 1985); Tyler Stovall, *Paris Noir: African Americans in the City of Light*, (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1996); Edward O. Ako, “L'Étudiant Noir and the Myth of the Genesis of the Negritude Movement,” *Research in African Literatures* 15 (1984); Brent Hayes Edwards, *The Practice of Diaspora: Literature, Translation, and the Rise of Black Internationalism*, (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 1998).

⁶³ James Clifford, *The Predicament of Culture: Twentieth-Century Ethnography, Literature, and Art*. (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1988), 130.

⁶⁴ Cited in Fowler, 222.

corresponded more to an older generation of humanist scholars such as Price-Mars, Mauss, and Rivet than his own generation.

Roumain found in Rivet an intellectual and political model: an anti-fascist intellectual who effectively balanced science and culture, activism and administration, scholarship and subversion, in a hostile environment. Rivet's socialist humanist approach to ethnography, and his use of museums in the fight against fascism, had a considerable impact on Roumain. Rivet had taken part in the Second French Geodesic Mission to Ecuador, spending five years in the country (1901-1906), during which he cultivated a passion for pre-Columbian American ethnology, particularly the study of migration patterns. Rivet had served as a medical doctor during the First World War, an experience that galvanized his internationalist approach to cultural and scientific questions.⁶⁵ Despite having been originally trained in the methods of French physical anthropology—the classification and hierarchization of races on an evolutionary scale based on anthropometric and craniometric data—Rivet openly criticized the validity of such conclusions, which had been pioneered by the Lamarckian French anthropologist Paul Broca in the late nineteenth-century.⁶⁶ Rivet was also a dedicated socialist and anti-Fascist who was elected to the Paris municipal council in 1935.⁶⁷ Following right-wing riots in Paris on 6 February 1934, which led to the collapse of the second *Cartel des gauches* government, Rivet, along with a small group of like-minded socialist intellectuals, formed the *Comité de vigilance des intellectuels antifascistes*, which played a critical role uniting left-wing groups in the formation of the Popular

⁶⁵ Alice Conklin, "Civil Society, Science, and Empire in Late Republican France: The Foundation of Paris's Museum of Man," *Osiris* 17 (2002), 255-290.

⁶⁶ Claude Blanckaert, *De la race à l'évolution: Paul Broca et l'anthropologie française* (Paris: Harmattan, 2009).

⁶⁷ Yvan Combeau, *Paris et les élections municipales sous la Troisième République: La scène capitale dans la vie politique française*, (Paris: Harmattan, 1998).

Front in 1936.⁶⁸ Rivet's political and professional work, particularly as expressed at the *Musée de l'homme*, personified what Roumain sought both politically and professionally.

At the *Musée de l'homme*, Roumain was assigned to the Hall of the Americas, working directly under Paul Rivet and taking courses on physical anthropology, the characteristics and classification of races, the history of global migrations, and most importantly for Roumain, *métissage*.⁶⁹ Rivet and Mauss argued that all peoples were the product of *métissage*, which Mauss once described as, "a mixture as magnificent as it is unique."⁷⁰ Similarly, Rivet claimed that "each people over the ages brings its tribute to all humanity and each new invention spreads around the world to increase the common patrimony a little."⁷¹ For Roumain, Mauss and Rivet's position on *métissage* reinforced what he had already perceived in the cultural practices of the Haitian peasantry. For instance, on 9 May 1938, in a Parisian radio broadcast entitled "Croyances religieuses populaires en Haïti," Roumain sought to dispel the exoticism surrounding vodou, and thus Haiti, by extolling the mixed character of vodou. After dismissing foreign observers of vodou, save for the American ethnologist Melville Herskovits who "...merits respect without reservations," Roumain claimed that when first exposed to vodou, one is amazed that "between vodou and Catholicism have been established, in many ways, relations of total intimacy" as "African gods and Catholic saints mingle in a strange litany."⁷² One recalls Roumain's initial and seemingly paradoxical account of his turn to communism, based in part on his knowledge of "that amazing mixture of Catholicism and vodou." Whereas Brouard saw

⁶⁸ Alice Conklin, "Civil Society, Science, and Empire in Late Republican France: The Foundation of Paris's Museum of Man," *Osiris* 17 (2002), 255-290.

⁶⁹ Christine Laurière, "Jacques Roumain, Ethnologue Haïtien," *L'Homme* 173 (2005), 191; Fowler, *A knot in the Thread*, 176-177.

⁷⁰ Marcel Mauss, "Les civilisations. Éléments et forms" (1929), 15.

⁷¹ Paul Rivet, "L'origine des techniques," *Les cahiers de Radio-Paris*, Archives du Musée de l'homme (hereafter cited as AMH), 2 AP 1 B14 A.

⁷² Christine Laurière, "Jacques Roumain: Croyances religieuses populaires d'Haïti" *Gradhiva* 1 (2005), 250.

vodou as fundamentally anti-rational and anti-modern, Roumain saw in it a practical model, a perfect melding of the particular and universal, the African and the European; in short, a uniquely Haitian alternative to the extremes of cultural relativism on the one hand and racial essentialism on the other. In a similar radio address a year earlier, Rivet had boasted of how “man takes possession of his entire universe and spreads its resources everywhere. The vast human community is established. A new miracle...thanks to the ingenuity of an obscure artisan.”⁷³ For Roumain, this “obscure artisan” was the Haitian peasant, whose “miracle” was vodou.

Through his study of ethnography, Roumain returned to the national question. In late 1938, Roumain collaborated with Price-Mars and Senghor, among others, on a collection of essays entitled *L'Homme de couleur*, which were published the following year. In Roumain's contribution, *Griefs de l'homme noir*, he critiqued the U.S. racial hierarchy that had historically oppressed African Americans. This essay reveals Roumain's shifting conceptions of race and nation informed by his ethnological training under Rivet, particularly on the role of miscegenation. Before deconstructing these concepts, Roumain points out that “...the term race implies a notion of homogeneity, of sacred purity,” yet “...for the ethnologist, race does not exist”⁷⁴ In pointing out the false equivalence between “race” and “sacred purity,” Roumain argued that all culture is mixed and any search for purity or authenticity is misguided at best. More importantly, Roumain went on, the proliferation of “mixed races” had gradually “...stabilized and when this development was achieved in a defined geographical area...it emerged as a...*nation*.”⁷⁵ It is then that “nation” becomes “confused with race.”⁷⁶ This tension

⁷³ AMH, 2 AP 1 B14 A, Paul Rivet, “L'origine des techniques,” *Les cahiers de Radio-Paris*, 1937.

⁷⁴ Jacques Roumain, “Griefs de l'homme noir,” in *Oeuvres Complètes*, ed. Léon-François Hoffmann (Madrid: ALLCA XX, Collection Archivos, 2003), 708.

⁷⁵ *Ibid.* 708.

between race and nation permeated early twentieth-century ethnography. Based on his experience in Haiti, Roumain rejected all notions of purity, racial, cultural, national, or otherwise. The tensions it created would structure Roumain's relationships with like-minded intellectuals, none more important than another former student of Mauss and Rivet, the Swiss ethnographer Alfred Métraux.

Exile and Home

On 27 June 1941, Alfred Métraux wrote a letter to Paul Rivet: "I am going to take a brief vacation to Haiti to breathe in a little of the exotic air."⁷⁶ Métraux, who had studied under Rivet at the *Institute d'ethnologie* during the 1920s, was then working at the Smithsonian's Bureau of American Ethnology, one of a number of Rivet's students dispersed throughout the world, transmitting and rearticulating French ethnographic thought. Only a month before, Roumain had returned to Haiti after nearly six years in exile. Despite belonging to the same intellectual networks generated under Rivet and Mauss at the *Musée de l'homme*, the two had never met, yet it was precisely those networks that drew them together during Métraux's trip to Haiti, when Roumain guided Métraux to the island of Tortuga off Haiti's northwest coast to visit archaeological sites. The two bonded immediately. Unlike the surrealist ethnographers, both Métraux and Roumain's ethnographic work was rigorous and scientific, while privileging dynamic cultural processes of mixture, movement, and change. Important to both men was a desire to establish an ethnology museum in Haiti, an urgent task given the threat to Haiti's cultural patrimony posed by the Catholic Church led "anti-superstitious" campaign, which

⁷⁶ *Ibid*, 709.

⁷⁷ AMH 2AP1C MERA-METR, Letter from Métraux to Rivet, 27 June 1941.

sought to eradicate vodou from the island.⁷⁸ After witnessing the destruction of vodou artifacts, Métraux later wrote, “I conceived the desire to study it before it was too late. The Haitian writer Jacques Roumain...was equally convinced of the need to put on record the story of Voodoo which seemed so gravely threatened...out of our discussions, was born the idea of a ‘Bureau of Ethnology’ for Haiti.”⁷⁹

Roumain’s correspondence with Métraux, creation of the *Bureau d’ethnologie*, and writings during these final three years of his life highlight a decisive moment in trans-Atlantic history, as early twentieth-century French ethnological thought confronted Haitian cultural nationalism. Métraux’s above quoted letter to Rivet regarding his imminent travel to Haiti is indicative of Rivet’s continued influence over his former students. Shortly after his return from Haiti, Métraux again wrote Rivet, who by that time had gone into exile in Colombia:

My stay in Haiti was very successful. Soustelle had generously prepared the way for me and with the Journal and Encyclopedia I was not a stranger. I contributed to the best of my ability to the creation of an Institute of Ethnology in Port-au-Prince where Jacques Roumain will be one of the instructors...it felt good to speak French...in an atmosphere that despite the temperature and race is still very French...My efforts would have borne other fruits if you were in France. We could then have developed a branch of the Institute on Haitian soil and obtained all the desirable facilities for archaeological research or otherwise.⁸⁰

In this letter, Métraux expresses both the significant disruption caused by exile, as well as the strength of their transnational networks. While Métraux’s collaboration with Roumain led to the creation of the Bureau of Ethnology, that work was inevitably hampered by Rivet’s dislocation from Paris. Just as Roumain would, in many ways, bring Paris back to Haiti, so too would

⁷⁸ Kate Ramsey, “Without One Ritual Note: Folklore Performance and the Haitian State, 1935-1946,” *Radical History Review* 84 (2002): 7-42.

⁷⁹ Alfred Métraux, *Voodoo in Haiti*, trans. Hugo Charteris (New York: Schocken Books, 1972), 17.

⁸⁰ AMH 2AP1C MERA-METR, Letter from Métraux to Rivet, 18 September 1941.

Métraux find comfort in an “atmosphere that despite the temperature and race is still very French.”

Born in Switzerland, raised in Argentina, and educated in Europe, Métraux was Roumain’s cosmopolitan equal. Like Roumain, Métraux was a peripatetic intellectual—founder of the Institute of Ethnology at the University of Tucumán, Argentina (1928-34), Fellow of the Hawaii’s Bishop Museum (1936-38), Guggenheim Fellow in residence at Yale University (1940), member of the Bureau of American Ethnology of the Smithsonian Institution (1941)—producing a wealth of research on race, culture, and questions of human progress.⁸¹ In May 1928, Métraux collaborated with Rivet on a collection of essays entitled *L’Art Précolombien*, which accompanied a major exhibition of pre-Columbian art at Paris’ *Musée des arts décoratifs*.⁸² In his essay, “*Ce Qui Reste des Grandes Civilisations de L’Amérique*,” Métraux optimistically noted that “the destruction of ancient American civilizations was rabid and brutal, but in many respects partial” and “...the vestiges accumulated in museums” would soon expose “...all that is still mysterious to us.”⁸³ For Rivet, Mauss, and those who studied under them, museums were an indispensable component in the consolidation of ethnography and the dissemination of ethnographic facts to other scholars and the French nation at large. Métraux’s above words also suggest that these thinkers’ work was informed by what Jacob Gruber termed ‘salvage ethnography,’ a characteristic trend among Western ethnographers expressing a duty to salvage artifacts of decaying cultures for display in metropolitan museums.⁸⁴

⁸¹ Charles Wagley, “Alfred Métraux 1902-1963,” *American Anthropologist* 66 (June, 1964), 603-613.

⁸² Rivet was so impressed by the exhibition that he took on its curator, the convivial French museologist Georges Henri-Rivière, as his new assistant director at the *Musée d’ethnographie* in 1928.

⁸³ Alfred Métraux, “*Ce Qui Reste des Grandes Civilisations de l’Amérique*,” in *L’Art Précolombien* (Les Cahiers de la République des lettres, des sciences et des arts, 1928), 33.

⁸⁴ Jacob W. Gruber, “Ethnographic Salvage and the Shaping of Anthropology,” *American Anthropologist* (1970): 1289-1299.

The interconnections between folklore, ethnography museums, and national politics are well documented. Elli Kögäs-Maranda has suggested that while colonial powers build anthropological museums, colonized countries erect folklore museums, based on the former's need to rationalize their imperial endeavors, and the latter's desire to locate and preserve a "collective identity." Drawing on Kögäs-Maranda, Richard Handler has argued that the "...desire for an ethnography museum" indicates a desire on the part of the colonized to "take its place within a full array of world class cultural institutions."⁸⁵ Kögäs-Maranda and Handler's observations suggest that Roumain and Métraux's collaborative idea for the Bureau, which also served as a museum, was inextricably bound to Haitian cultural nationalist politics, while critically informed by the cultural politics each had encountered in Paris.

As director of the Bureau, Roumain sought to establish connections with ethnographic museums throughout the world, a move that could potentially both integrate and defend Haitian national culture to an international audience, a task facilitated by his Paris connections. Thus, when the tensions in France forced Paul Rivet to take refuge in Bogota, Colombia, where he established an Institute of Ethnology in November 1941, Roumain reached out to his former professor in an effort to establish institutional links between Haiti and Columbia. In a letter to Rivet on 3 November 1941, Roumain wrote, "having left Paris, I proceeded to the United States to study anthropology at Columbia University and soon returned to my country...I had proposed to Dr Price-Mars, the Haitian ethnographer, to create here an Institute of Ethnology. The passage through Port-au-Prince of Soustelle, then of Métraux has given new impetus to this project."⁸⁶

⁸⁵ Richard Handler, *Nationalism and the Politics of Culture in Quebec*, (Madison: The University of Wisconsin Press, 1988).

⁸⁶ A transcribed letter from Roumain to Rivet transcribed in Christine Laurière, "Jacques Roumain: Croyances religieuses populaires d'Haïti" *Gradhiva* 1 (2005), 250.

Although Roumain never corroborated Métraux's claim that the two had come up with the idea for the museum's creation together, the vitality of the network they shared is unmistakable.

Under Roumain's direction, the Bureau would comprise two distinct collections—Archaeology and Afro-Haitian Ethnology—open to international researchers, though “in particular the students of the Institute of Ethnology,” an affiliated institution created by Jean Price-Mars later that year.⁸⁷ The Bureau would “make inventory of, classify, and conserve previously collected archeological items; investigate and preserve archaeological sites, and publish a quarterly bulletin bearing the results of research conducted by the Bureau.”⁸⁸ In Roumain's absence, indigenism had evolved into the Griots' racial essentialist ideology. Unwilling to participate in the reproduction of a new and more dangerous nationalism, Roumain found in Haiti's pre-Columbian past a decidedly more innocuous outlet for his intellectual pursuits.⁸⁹ Roumain's interest in Haiti's pre-Columbian past, particularly the Taïno and Ciboney tribes, was doubtless a result of his time studying Meso-American migration and *métissage* under Rivet at the *Musée de l'homme*. During this period, Roumain also engaged in a series of debates over the “anti-superstitious” campaign with the Catholic priest, Père Foisset, in the Haitian newspaper, *Le Nouvelliste*. Throughout these debates, Roumain relied on his ethnographic training to defend the peasantry, criticizing the peremptory and anti-scientific basis of the campaign. Roumain argued that peasant mysticism represented a necessary stage in human progress, comparable to Europe's Middle Ages. Roumain agreed that the peasants had to abandon their reliance on vodou, which blinded them to their material conditions, but he claimed

⁸⁷ Jacques Roumain, “Le Musée du Bureau d’Ethnologie,” in *Oeuvres Complètes*, ed. Léon-François Hoffmann (Madrid: ALLCA XX Collection Archivos, 2003): 1160.

⁸⁸ Fowler, *A Knot in the Thread*, 214.

⁸⁹ Roumain's interest in pre-Columbian archaeology was during his time in Brussels during the first year of exile. See Fowler, *A Knot in the Thread*, 176.

that the peasants would be better served by an “anti-misery” campaign.⁹⁰ Roumain pointed out that it was “...the progress of science, the continued development of human culture, an understanding of the universe,” that allowed a people to advance to another stage of development, not religious threats.⁹¹ More importantly, “the so-called superstitious practices in which he indulges have a universal character...the amalgam is total; and as it is syncretism, the persistence of one of the factors—vodou—depends on the existence of the other: Catholicism. In short, one must be Catholic to practice vodou.”⁹² Fusing Rivet and Mauss’ instruction on syncretism with the symbolic force of vodou, Roumain challenged the notion that universals and particulars were antithetical; for Roumain, they were indivisible and nowhere is this conception more apparent than in his post-humous masterpiece *Gouverneurs de la rosée*.

Conclusion

Gouverneurs de la rosée is central to any attempt to unravel the relationships between culture and politics, nationalism and internationalism, and, above all, Haiti’s place in twentieth-century trans-Atlantic history. The novel centers on Manuel, a Haitian peasant forced to find work at a U.S. sugar plantation in Cuba where he and his fellow workers went on strike against the plantation’s terrible conditions. Returning to Haiti, Manuel tried to imbue his fellow peasants with a sense of their role as global actors under modern capitalism, international proletarians who need only realize their own collective power to end their exploitation and create a new, more equitable world. Scholars have tended to appraise the novel based on its two major themes:

⁹⁰ Jacques Roumain, “À Propos de la Campagne ‘Anti-Superstitieuse:’ Las Supersticiones,” in *Oeuvres Complètes*, ed. Léon-François Hoffmann (Madrid: ALLCA XX, Collection Archivos, 2003): 758

⁹¹ Jacques Roumain, *Le Nouvelliste*, March 1942, translated by Fowler in *A Knot in the Thread*, 332.

⁹² Jacques Roumain, “À Propos de la Campagne ‘Anti-Superstitieuse:’ Las Supersticiones,” in *Oeuvres Complètes*, ed. Léon-François Hoffmann (Madrid: ALLCA XX, Collection Archivos, 2003): 749.

indigenist cultural nationalism and Marxist internationalism. In 1956, the American author and critic Edmund Wilson offered an emblematic critique, describing the book as an “...inevitable Communist novel that is turned out in every country in compliance with the Kremlin’s prescription...Roumain has indulged himself in a Marxist fantasy.”⁹³

No one has written more incisively on *Gouverneurs de la rosée* than J. Michael Dash. In his introduction to the 1978 English translation of the novel, Dash described Roumain’s novel as “...a parable of universal proportions,” comparing it to the work of other Caribbean writers like Claude McKay and Orlando Patterson, whose writing exhibits “...a similar combination of the particular and universal.”⁹⁴ Dash also recognized an important “conflict between two visions of the world” that infused the novel.⁹⁵ In 2008, Dash revisited this conflict, suggesting it was rooted in two antithetical ethnographic conceptions of the Haitian peasantry held by Roumain. The first, shared by Jean Price-Mars and Melville Herskovits, saw the peasantry as attached to African cultural survivals, producing a psychological dilemma for those unable to reconcile those survivals with an intrusive Western modernity. Both Herskovits and Price-Mars were convinced that serious research on peasant life required rural isolation, removed from the contaminating influence of urban centers.⁹⁶ The second is found in the work of Métraux, who was more interested in the “...dynamic aspect of voodoo” found “... in the capital;” accordingly, Dash concluded, “Roumain is at least as interested in the idea of a migrant peasant culture as in the survivals of an archaic past.”⁹⁷ In this reading, Dash has come nearest to Roumain’s thought.

⁹³ Edmund Wilson, *Red, Black, Blond, and Olive: Studies in Four Civilizations Zuni, Haiti, Soviet Russia, and Israel*, (London: W.H. Allen, 1956), 116.

⁹⁴ J. Michael Dash, “Introduction,” in Jacques Roumain, *Masters of the Dew*, trans. Langston Hughes and Mercer Cook (Oxford: Heinemann Educational Publishers, 1978), 18

⁹⁵ *Ibid.*, 17

⁹⁶ J. Michael Dash, “Fictions of Displacement: Locating Modern Haitian Narratives” *Small Axe* 27, (October 2008), 32-41

⁹⁷ *Ibid.*

Nevertheless, Roumain would have rejected the idea that his perspective was bound by antithetical tensions. Terrified by the chaos he witnessed in Haiti and Europe, Roumain perpetually sought an idealistic middle path, in which apparent opposites, contradictions, and juxtapositions could achieve harmony through fusion.

If, during his exile, Roumain acquired Saïd's theoretical "double perspective" that views everything in a juxtaposition of "home and elsewhere," then it is equally true that when Roumain returned to Haiti he saw everything in a juxtaposition of transnational exile and home. In 1941, shortly before his return, Roumain wrote to his wife, Nicole, "when I return to Haiti, I will be surrounded by strange faces. A generation born and another raised since my last imprisonment and these days of exile."⁹⁸ Although unaware at the time, Roumain's stay in Haiti would be short lived, as he was assigned to a government post in Mexico in September 1942; he died of uncertain causes two years later. Although best remembered *Gouverneurs de la rosée*, Roumain's personal history suggests that the tensions in his final novel were neither ethnographic, nationalist, nor Marxist in origin; rather, they were the result of a Caribbean intellectual, transformed through transnational exile and ethnographic thought, who sought a fundamentally new condition for humanity, a triumphant universal vision rooted in cultural particulars.

⁹⁸ Jacques Roumain, "Lettre à Nicole, 21 mars 1941," in *Jacques Roumain: Oeuvres Complètes*, ed. Léon-François Hoffmann (Madrid: ALLCA XX, Collection Archivos, 2003), 639.

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